



EVIDENCE, A DANCE COMPANY
RONALD K. BROWN/ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Mission Statement

The mission of Evidence, Inc. is to promote understanding of the human experience in the African Diaspora through dance and storytelling and to provide sensory connections to history and tradition through music, movement, and spoken word, leading deeper into issues of spirituality, community responsibility and liberation.

Overview

Founded by Ronald K. Brown in 1985 and based in Brooklyn, New York, **EVIDENCE, A DANCE COMPANY** focuses on the seamless fusion of traditional African dance with contemporary choreography and spoken word. This work provides a unique view of human struggles, tragedies, and triumphs. Brown uses movement as a way to reinforce the importance of community in African American culture and to acquaint audiences with the beauty of traditional African forms and rhythms. He is an advocate for the growth of an African American dance community and is instrumental in encouraging young dancers to choreograph and to develop careers in dance.

Brown's choreography is in high demand and he has choreographed works on Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, Cleo Parker Robinson Ensemble, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Jennifer Muller/The Works, Jeune Ballet d'Afrique Noire, Ko-Thi Dance Company and Philadanco. He choreographed Regina Taylor's award-winning play, Crowns.

"I hope that when people see the work their spirits are lifted. I am interested in sharing perspectives through modern dance, theater and kinetic storytelling. I want my work to be evidence of these perspectives," says Brown.

Evidence now tours to some 30 communities in the United States annually. It has also traveled overseas to Cuba, Brazil, England, France, Greece, Hungary, Mexico and Senegal to perform, teach master classes and conduct lecture/demonstrations for young people. Evidence brings arts education and cultural/historical connections to local communities that have historically lacked these experiences. Annually the company reaches an audience of more than 30,000.

Artistic Background and Statement

Ronald K. Brown has been making dances since the second grade. Growing up in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, New York, he took classes in the Police Athletic League Dance Program and performed in his high school's musicals. He studied extensively with Mary Anthony, whose technique includes a combination of Martha Graham and Hanya

Holm. Brown's first performance was held at Anthony's studio, financed by three family members each donating \$200 for staging and costumes. Early on he performed with Jennifer Muller/The Works, who along with Bebe Miller and Maguy Marin were hugely influential to his work.

Brown's dances derive from his interpretation of the human condition and refer to numerous cultural sources. These sources include history, traditions, and dance forms from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, combined with kinetic story telling, and modern and urban dance movement. Through dance Brown explores the history of blacks in America and passes on African culture to a new generation. His stories and movement express traditional themes of community, ritual, and collective experience. He wants audiences to see commonplace subjects in new ways, to open their minds to new experiences, and to foster tolerance and spiritual growth. In Brown's words he wants his work to represent "all the information that has gone into us – the stories, the history. It is really the human experience."

Brown selects dancers who interpret his choreography with an open, sharing spirit. He says, "It is a challenge to find dancers interested and willing to go beyond the facade. Classical lines are as essential in dance moves from Guinea as using the back in choreography from Haiti. The hip-hop culture is creating an openness and honesty about the way people live. Versatility is important, as is being able to go from one style to the next."

Music and text fuel Brown's story telling and reflected in his programming is a broad range of musical forms from classical or world music to pop or hip-hop. Musical choices lend special meaning to the work. *Upside Down*, about a community in mourning is accompanied by a vocalist from Mali and that of Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo Kuti. *Come Ye* is inspired by the work of jazz singer Nina Simone and the events of September 11th. *Grace*, originally choreographed for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, is a spiritual journey set to the music of Duke Ellington and others.

Highlights

1987 – Judith Jamison meets a 21 year-old, precocious dancer, Ronald K. Brown while he is performing with Jennifer Muller's company. She later sees a dance that he choreographed for the Cleo Parker Robinson Ensemble and invites Brown to create a piece for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

1994 – *Dirt Road* premieres. This evening-length work is first presented at the Lyon Biennale de la Danse. Based on considerable personal, historic and spiritual research, it tells of a family whose members separated by their own lives, reunite for a funeral and a celebration. This work solidifies Brown's use of storytelling as a primary creative source.

1995 – Brown travels to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire to teach contemporary dance to the theater company, Koteba Ensemble de Koteba. This experience is the first of several teaching trips that Brown makes over the next three years of four-to-six week duration. Africa expands Brown's movement vocabulary and shapes his awareness of his artistic potential and his role in contemporary dance.

1999 – Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater premieres *Grace*, choreographed by Ronald K. Brown. *Grace* introduces his work to world-wide audiences and remains to this day in the Ailey repertory.

2001 – Brown and Evidence travel to Cuba as part of a cultural exchange program and work with contemporary and folkloric companies in Havana. In Cuba he explores similarities between dances from West Africa, Cuba and Haiti, further expanding his movement vocabulary and deepening his interest in contemporary folklore.

2002 – Dancers become salaried, providing full time work for Evidence artists for the first time.

2003 – Evidence, A Dance Company moves to a new space in downtown Brooklyn. This move positions Evidence as an accessible member of the Brooklyn cultural community.

2006 – Ronald K. Brown receives the inaugural United States Artists Rose Fellowship Award. He is one of only 50 artists, including four choreographers to receive an award.

2007 – Evidence premieres the full evening length work *One Shot: Rhapsody in Black and White*. The multimedia work is inspired by the images and legacy of noted African American photographer Charles "Teenie" Harris. A traveling photo exhibit is curated by Brown and noted historian and photography scholar Deborah Willis.