

A Note From *Bill's Desk*

McCarter

February 2, 2022

Ayodele Casel (with Arturo O’Farrill)

Whatever else happened in the dance world in the past couple of pre-pandemic years, there were notable evolutions of two dance forms – one old (tap), one new (jookin’), both personified by breakout stars whose artistry helped bring them to the fore, and whose contributions amount to what could only be described as “revelatory.”

We all remember Savion Glover, but tap dance has more than come into its own and experienced a sea-change in 2019 thanks to artists like Michelle Dorrance, who brought her company to McCarter last fall. But in addition to Dorrance, the star in tap’s emergence as a long-overlooked and marginalized dance form has been the solo artist Ayodele Casel, who joins her frequent collaborator Arturo O’Farrill and his Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra on February 19th. Mentored by the legendary Gregory Hines, she has become a one-woman ambassador representing the history of tap and especially its forgotten female interpreters who came before her. And although Casel now has her own dance company to help carry the message, her exuberance on nothing but a 4X4 ‘ tap stage is a spectacular display of technique and heart, paying homage to her predecessors – which helps explain why *The New York Times* called her partnership with O’Farrill a “knockout joyfest.”

L’il Buck’s *Memphis Jookin’*

And since you have no idea what “Jookin’” is, it’s time you knew, which is why we’re bringing to McCarter its foremost practitioner, L’il Buck, who has conceived, choreographed and stars in “Memphis Jookin’”(March 23rd), an ode to his hometown where the dance form emerged from local street dance to international phenomenon. Actor, model, and lifelong dancer, Charles Riley (aka “L’il Buck”) discovered jookin’ when he was twelve, and has gone on to headline this tribute to Memphis, joined by a company of dancers and music that evokes the energy of the streets and clubs where jookin’ was born. His journey to the top was helped by collaborations along the way with the former NYCB star Damian Wozel (now the President of The Juilliard School) who paired him with cellist Yo-Yo Ma in a YouTube video that went viral, and the rest is history (including dancing for Madonna in her Super Bowl halftime show). Still aren’t sure exactly what jookin’ is? Here’s how one critic summed it up: “Hip -Hop meets ballet in one man’s body.”

Pam Tanowitz Dance & Simone Dinnerstein, piano

When is a dance concert more than just a dance concert but also a music recital – a true collaboration between two performing arts genres. When you attend a dance performance, the music is normally recorded, and that is what you expect. There are exceptions, of course, like big ballet companies (the New York City Ballet, ABT) and Mark Morris, who has made live music a trademark. But what makes this collaboration so unique, in which a brilliant choreographer (Pam Tanowitz) and a brilliant pianist (Simone Dinnerstein) join forces (on March 11th) in a work that sent the critics exhausting their superlatives? Their *New Work for Goldberg Variations* is an evening-length creation based on Bach's keyboard masterpiece, which has long been a Dinnerstein specialty (including her best-selling 2007 CD) but played live as the pianist is surrounded by Pam Tanowitz' dancers, whose vocabulary echoes and converses with Bach's iconic score, swerving and mirroring from the music's structure in unpredictable and delightful ways. As the dancers move through space to the music, the result is an interplay of rhythm, style, and idiosyncrasy in which Tanowitz' contemporary dance forms seem to reflect *Goldberg's* musical architecture. How to describe it in one sentence? A choreographer meets Bach, and it's a perfect match in which both win – as will you in watching and listening.

Mark Morris Dance Group

After fifteen engagements since 1987, you might get the point that I regard the Mark Morris Dance Group (April 13) as McCarter's signature relationship with any single dance company since the days of Alvin Ailey. Fearless with his subject matter, be it sex, despair, havoc or sheer joy, Morris remains (with Twyla Tharp) the only American choreographer of his generation to have extended the expressive scope of contemporary dance as an art form -- or to put it another way, "the most successful and influential choreographer alive" (*The New York Times*). He founded the MMDG in 1980 and has since created over 150 works for his company ; it remains the only one outside of classical ballet committed to performing live music, a feature of every performance, including his return to McCarter. There are works of his I never tire of seeing, but the program this time will feature three dances new to our audience: *Dancing Honeymoon* (set to historical recordings by Gertrude Lawrence and Jack Buchanan); *Rock of Ages* (the adagio movement from Schubert's Piano Trio in E-flat, D.987; and *Festival Dance* (set to Hummel's Piano Trio No. 5, Op.83) . Morris' programs represent a true collaboration of genres – dance and music – much like that of Pam Tanowitz and Simone Dinnerstein on March 11.

—William W. Lockwood, Jr.
Director of Special Programming

