



KYLE ABRAHAM/ABRAHAM.IN.MOTION

The mission of Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion is to create an evocative interdisciplinary body of work.

Born into Hip Hop culture in the late 70's and raised with an artistic upbringing including classical cello, piano and the visual arts, Kyle Abraham approaches movement as a way to deeply delve into identity as it relates to personal history. From this approach, the work entwines a sensual and provocative vocabulary with a strong emphasis on sound, human behavior and all things visual in an effort to create an avenue for personal investigation that exposes itself on stage.

A.I.M is an intentional representation of dancers from various disciplines and diverse personal backgrounds. Together, these individualities blend the human experience of physical, emotional and psychological encounters to create a conversation of movement that is then manipulated and molded into something fresh and unique. Each convergence of dancing bodies is a new opportunity, a new discussion for the artist and audience to engage in and ultimately take with them when they leave the theater.

Abraham.In.Motion is a proud supporter of Dancers Responding to AIDS.

For more information please visit www.abrahaminmotion.org

**ABRAH
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Kyle Abraham
Artistic Director

2012 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award recipient and 2012 USA Ford Fellow, Kyle Abraham, began his training at the Civic Light Opera Academy and the Creative and Performing Arts High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He continued his dance studies in New York, receiving a BFA from SUNY Purchase and an MFA from NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

In November 2012, Abraham was named the newly appointed New York Live Arts Resident Commissioned Artist for 2012-2014. Just one month later, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater premiered Abraham's newest work, *Another Night* at New York's City Center to rave reviews. Rebecca Bengal of *Vogue* writes, "What Abraham brings to Ailey is an avant-garde aesthetic, a original and politically minded downtown sensibility that doesn't distinguish between genres but freely draws on a vocabulary that is as much Merce and Martha as it is Eadweard Muybridge and Michael Jackson."

In 2011, *OUT Magazine* labeled Abraham as the "best and brightest creative talent to emerge in New York City in the age of Obama."

Abraham received a prestigious Bessie Award for Outstanding Performance in Dance for his work in *The Radio Show*, and a Princess Grace Award for Choreography in 2010. He was also selected as one of *Dance Magazine's* 25 To Watch in 2009.

His choreography has been presented throughout the United States and abroad, most recently at *On The Boards*, South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center, REDCAT, Philly Live Arts, Portland's Time Based Arts Festival, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Danspace Project, Dance Theater Workshop, Bates Dance Festival, Harlem Stage, Fall for Dance Festival at New York's City Center, Montreal, Germany, Jordan, Ecuador, Dublin's Project Arts Center, The Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum located in Okinawa Japan, The Andy Warhol Museum and The Kelly-Strayhorn Theater in his hometown of Pittsburgh, PA.

In addition to performing and developing new works for his company, *Abraham.In.Motion*, Abraham also teaches his unique approach to post-modern dance in various schools and studios throughout the United States and is currently working on a new pas de deux for himself and acclaimed Bessie Award winning dancer and New York City Principle, Wendy Whelan while creating new works for his company *A/I/M*.

For more information please visit: <http://abrahaminmotion.org>

REPERTORY

The Watershed (NDP Supported for 2014/2015)

The Watershed, an evening-length work for nine dancers, is a commanding and provocative cross-cultural exploration of freedom. Featuring Abraham's signature style of mellifluous fluidity juxtaposed with sharp accents, *The Watershed* follows the universal aspiration toward freedom and simultaneously references the emancipation following the civil war, the political tumult of 1960s and the civil rights challenges of our present day. The work features arresting scenic design by world-renowned visual artist Glenn Ligon and a score ranging from a contemporary cello suite to the soulful sounds of Otis Redding.

When the Wolves Came In (NDP Supported 2014/2015)

When the Wolves Came In, a stand-alone repertory-based program, explores the historical legacy of two totemic triumphs in the international history of civil rights: the 150th anniversary of the emancipation proclamation and the 20th anniversary of the abolishment of apartheid in South Africa. The works take their inspiration from Max Roach's iconic 1960 protest album *We Insist: Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*, which celebrated the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation and shed a powerful light on the growing civil rights movements in South Africa and the U.S. The potent themes inherent in these historical milestones are evident in Abraham's choreography, evocative scenery by visual artist Glenn Ligon, the visceral power of Roach's masterwork and original compositions of Grammy® award-winning jazz musician Robert Glasper.

Live Music Program

Kyle Abraham/Abraham. In.Motion presents its first ever live music mixed repertory program, which includes works ranging from *The Quiet Dance* (2011), set to the Bernstein classic, *Some Other Time*; *The Gettin'* (2014), created in collaboration with Grammy Award winning composer, Robert Glasper; *Untitled* (2015), a new solo work created in collaboration with Blue Note recording artist, Otis Brown III and interdisciplinary artist, Tahir Hemphill.

Pavement (NDP Supported for 2012/13)

Pavement, reimagined as a dance work and now set in Pittsburgh's historically black neighborhoods, Homewood and the Hill District, "Boyz" pays comedic homage to the bold Kris Kross/backward jean and high top fade era in Hip-Hop, while creating a strong emotional chronology of a culture conflicted with a history plagued by discrimination, genocide, and a constant quest for a lottery ticket weighted in freedom.

"AVANT-GARDE AESTHETIC, A ORIGINAL AND POLITICALLY MINDED DOWNTOWN SENSIBILITY THAT DOESN'T DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GENRES BUT FREELY DRAWS ON A VOCABULARY THAT IS AS MUCH MERCE AND MARTHA AS IT IS EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE AND MICHAEL JACKSON."

-REBECCA BENGAL, VOGUE





RESIDENCY AND OUTREACH

TECHNIQUE CLASSES

Classes taught by AIM emphasize four specific core values: exploration, musicality, abandonment, and intuition. The opening warm-up sequence focuses on the fluidity of the spine, articulation, and core body strengthening and then builds up to challenging, creative and invigorating phrase work. Students experience a personalized post-modern movement vocabulary full of intricate gestures and fearless floor work.

LECTURE DEMONSTRATION

AIM's Lecture Demonstrations are a hands on, active, informative and most of all fun. Company members demonstrate the explorative creative process of our current repertory by sharing intricacies and foundation of our movement vocabulary and it's end result.

CREATIVE DANCE CREATION WORKSHOP

AIM Creative Dance Creation Workshop is a guided process that allows students to create work within an encouraging, secure, and motivational environment. In the workshop participants will develop material in class, and will receive feedback from the Company.

DANCE AS IDENTITY OWNERSHIP

Dance as Identity is a new initiative from AIM and an important work. The focus of this workshop is to present students/dancers with an opportunity to use dance as a platform for generating and exploring dialogue and movement dialogue about gender and sexuality. Conversations sway between the social and political, stereotypical and biased, and that which is private and present. Humanities, literature, media, film and history, Cultural theory, visual art and philosophy all play a role in our discourse and the most compelling project is considering these culturally identifying relationships with movement. This workshop is first and foremost safe and educational. It goes without saying that a vow of confidentiality must be understood and taken seriously.

UNIFYING UNIQUENESS

Participants will learn phrase material from both The Watershed and Hallowed as a way to delve into the various ways the company generates and develops movement. Part conversation and part workshop, together the class will investigate the ideologies surrounding our own uniqueness and likenesses.

MEALS AND MOTION

Meet and greet with AIM, where community members can experience a live excerpt from the work, then join in conversation with the company and each other about their neighborhood. Through relaxed conversation, flexible instigations, direct questions and personal talks, guests will enjoy food and beverage with Kyle Abraham and AIM dancers and delve into ideas, issues, proposals inherent in the work and its impact on the personal and local community. These conversations can happen in a multitude of unique spaces (including churches, high schools, community centers, etc).

THE MORNING AFTER

The Morning After is an informal brunch with AIM held the morning after the company's final performance at each venue. This brunch allows for an opportunity for audiences to talk with the company on a more one-on-one basis and for the company to engage in a more personalized discussion on the work and activities throughout the performance week.

PRESS QUOTES

"...a head roll casting ripples down through the shoulders and arms; floor-skimming scoots with one leg in arabesque; squalls that erupt from the torso while the feet stand their ground, the body fighting itself or something unseen."

**-Siobhan Burke,
The New York Times**

"...his wonderfully expressive body sometimes suggests Moronobu's influence in its settled clarity, its slow gestures, and the way his hands flick the space around him. Yet his rippling arms, hips, and shoulders also reach back to Africa and forward to hip-hop."

**-Deborah Jowitz,
The Village Voice**

"Alternately propulsive and staccato, fluid and gentle, his solo performances often explore notions of masculinity in an urban environment, using car alarms, gunshots, and hip-hop as his soundtrack (see the piece *Inventing Pookie Jenkins*)"

-Out Magazine

"Abraham's *'Live! The Realest MC,'* is an abstract, modern-day take on the Pinocchio tale, and the excerpts shown here are a tour de force of movement and unsettling bursts of fear. Abraham is something of an emotional chameleon. His stage persona often appears as a street-smart dude who sports a tough armor, but we recognize it to be a shield for vulnerability. Frequently he or his dancers burst unexpectedly from near-stupors into storms of turns or jumps, as if no longer able to stay coiled within. Watched carefully, Abraham's group choreography displays an intensely naked understanding of humanity; watching Abraham dance alone is deeply moving."

**-Janine Parker,
The Boston Globe**

"On its most basic level, *Live! The Realest MC* is about trying to be gay in the 'hood. But to reduce it to only that would be vastly understating the importance of the work and its remarkable technical and artistic accomplishment."

**-Andy Horwitz,
Culturebot**

"...lush movement, infectious music and magnetic dancers (the choreographer included)..."

**-Siobhan Burke, The
New York Times**

"Kyle Abraham is the biggest choreographic force coming out of Pittsburgh and has taken a prominent place as a must-see choreographer on the New York scene."

**-Jane Vranish,
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

"...Mr. Abraham offered a swagger that paradoxically denied and laVid bare a core of throbbing hurt."

**-Claudia La Rocco,
The New York Times**

"The pervasive movement style is so bold and even fearless that you might not spot the intricacy of the choreography until the whole seven-member company dances in vperfect unison."

-Los Angeles Times

"Sinewy, subtle and explosive... There is a strength and sexiness, that is not forced, not in your face, but instead a calm confident tone that is endearing and enthralling..."

-Eye Spy LA

"Kyle Abraham and his dancers set the red seats at the Kelly Strayhorn aflame with passionate, provocative dance movements and choreography that none in attendance will soon forget. The theater was filled to capacity, and the audience cheered Abraham and his dancers with enthusiasm that can only be borne from deep appreciation and satisfaction."

**-Tameka L Cage,
Pittsburgh Courier**

"What's best about Abraham's work here is the way in which personal and public history are intertwined in a subtle way that mimics many people's lived experiences... It's exactly the kind of show that should excite dance fans..."

-Out West Arts

"Whether he's taking on social issues or making ever bigger splashes on the local and national scenes, the sense that Abraham is on the verge of a breakthrough looms primarily because his talent is just too big to ignore."

**-Steve Sucato,
City Paper**



**ABRAHAM
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Man of the Moment

by Rachel F. Elson

Choreographer Kyle Abraham's works are freighted with heavy social questions, tackling issues like race, gender, isolation and community. But what might be most intriguing is his physical vocabulary. As both a choreographer and a performer himself, Abraham fuses the rippled posturing of hip hop with the curves and weight of modern dance. A stutter pulses through two men's bodies as they negotiate their approach; the adjustment of a hand position gives a shoulder roll a streetwise edge. "Watching him in the studio, it's like watching an artist doing sketches; you can't tell where a movement begins and where it ends," says Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater artistic director Robert Battle. When he commissioned Abraham to create *Another Night* for the company in 2012, he explains, "everyone was learning a new language." In the last two years, it seems, the 36-year-old dancer and choreographer has suddenly landed in the spotlight. Abraham's strong social messages and hybrid style have made him the darling of the dance world establishment—gaining him honors from Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, commissions from Alvin Ailey and New York Live Arts, and a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship, often referred to as a "genius grant." The recent attention has been a game changer: This winter alone, he worked on a set of new works for NYLA, a solo that premiered in Lyon, France, and a video side project, while also preparing

new members of his company for tours of *Pavement* and *The Radio Show*—all before heading abroad to perform a duet with Wendy Whelan this summer. Now, everyone is asking: What will Kyle Abraham do next? Abraham's diverse set of influences—which range from Martha Graham to hip hop and rave culture—may owe something to the fact that he didn't begin dance training until his senior year in high school, after being cast in a school musical. He immediately started taking some classes at Pittsburgh's Civic Light Opera Academy, as well as at the Creative and Performing Arts High School. "All the teachers were so encouraging," he says. While Abraham played catch-up with technique, "they would bring me in tapes to watch—Garth Fagan, Ulysses Dove." He says now that late start actually helped determine his path. "Because I came to it so late, I always thought I was going to be a choreographer." He went on to study at SUNY Purchase, where there were two separate composition classes at any time—so he would do his own class assignments, then ask about the other class's tasks and do those on his own. "From the get-go, he made solos for himself that showed something special about him as a dancer," says Neil Greenberg, a former choreography professor at Purchase. "He's really successful at stripping away the aspects of the modern dance vernacular that get in the way for him, but without taking away everything." Finding an artistic home after graduation, however, proved challenging. Abraham quickly got a position with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane—one of the companies that had inspired him in high school—but "that did not work out well," Abraham says. "You don't learn in college about

company dynamics. I was like: Wait, I can't just do my own thing?" He was fired within the year. "I realized years later that I didn't really want to be a dancer in the company; I just wanted to be around those people." Even Jones—now executive artistic director of NYLA and a big supporter of Abraham's work—concedes that he didn't notice the young dancer's talent. "I had a room full of personalities," he says. "I told him later that I wasn't really seeing him at that time." Back in Pittsburgh, Abraham's father was showing early signs of Alzheimer's. So he took time off, moving home for a while, and then wandering to London and San Francisco, working in retail, considering other paths. But by 2004, he was ready to give dance another try and entered the MFA program at New York University. "The first year was a struggle," he admits, "but I was making work. There were really talented dancers that I got to work with." During the summer program there, he caught the eye of choreographer David Dorfman, who later asked him to join his namesake company. "I loved that company," Abraham says. "There were times I forgot we got paid." Meanwhile, his own work was getting noticed, as well. Abraham began making solo appearances at DanceNow NYC and Harlem Stage while still at NYU; by the time he appeared at the White Wave Festival in 2005, he had a name for what was then a one-man company: Kyle Abraham/*Abraham.In.Motion*. A jaw-dropping solo piece, *Inventing Pookie Jenkins*—featuring Abraham, shirtless, in a flowing maxi-skirt—landed him a slot at New York's Fall for Dance showcase. "I remember seeing this

young guy, wearing a long, white skirt, moving in the most seductive and beguiling way," says Jones, who saw a kindred spirit in the younger man. "It felt like an idea I would have done in my time and in my way. I thought: Look at the time we're in right now, that he can be on-stage and move that way." Connections back in Pittsburgh helped Abraham find funding to develop work there; later support from the Joyce Theater Foundation in New York allowed him to bring in administrative help and an editing advisor—ultimately helping Abraham create *The Radio Show*, a 2010 Bessie Award-winning piece. Then, in one breakout year, 2012, Abraham hit the big time: He was named the 2012–14 resident commissioned artist at NYLA; he also received the Jacob's Pillow Dance Award, as well as the Ailey commission and a \$50,000 grant from United States Artists. Just a few years earlier, Abraham was taking food stamps to get by; now he left Dorfman to focus on his own company; soon after, he received the prestigious MacArthur nod, worth \$625,000 over a five-year period. In conversation, Abraham is thoughtful and culturally omnivorous. At one point, he mentions James Baldwin as an influence—then dismisses him as too obvious. Back in high school, he recalls, he resisted full-time enrollment at the performing arts school because the academics were stronger at his own school. His musical tastes include classic jazz and pop, but also contemporary classical star Nico Muhly. Those influences weave their way into his dances. *The Radio Show* looks at communication breakdowns—the demise of urban radio and his father's aphasia and Alzheimer's—while both *Live! The Realest MC* and *Pavement* deal with cultural notions of masculinity for black men. To create work, he immerses him-

self in a piece's concept—reading Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns*, about the Great Migration, in the warm-up to *Pavement*, and studying up on the civil-rights movement (and listening to music of the era) for a new work dealing with the 1960s. Abraham admits there's a flip side to the flurry of attention. As generous as the MacArthur grant is, it also puts a new level of pressure on a company still operating like a startup, with a slender checking account, no board and no individual donor base. "My dancers still need money; I still live in a studio apartment—in a basement." And although he's now able to pay for health insurance for his company, he points out, "I still have dancers who want to leave to go dance somewhere else. I still have to strive to be that choreographer who dancers want to spend their career with." However, Abraham now has dance world luminaries lining up to support him. At Ailey, Battle speaks hopefully of future commissions; Jones, meanwhile, expresses hope that he can pass along to Abraham some of the help he himself received as a young choreographer. "This is an exhilarating time for him—but this is a treacherous time for him," Jones says. "Everybody wants a piece." Even more challenging for Abraham himself, perhaps, is the expectations the MacArthur honor confers on its recipients. "The scary thing for me is thinking about the weight of the award," Abraham says. "It sets up an expectation that the work will always be great. There's no guarantee."

- See more at: <http://www.dancemagazine.com/issues/April-2014/Man-of-the-moment/#sthash.ilkwDq0a.dpuf>



ABRAHAM
IN
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The Seattle Times

March 5, 2015

DANCEMAKER KYLE ABRAHAM LETS THE 'WOLVES' OUT AT THE MOORE

by Alice Kaderlan

In the eight years since New York-based dance maker Kyle Abraham founded his own company, he has won critical and popular acclaim for his unique choreographic style and a thoughtfulness borne of his experience as a gay black man.

With three pieces that Abraham has created under the rubric "When the Wolves Came In" (also the title of the first work), he demonstrates once again his capacity for striking visual imagery, inventive movement and emotional depth. All three are inspired by jazz drummer/composer Max Roach's 1960 protest album "We Insist! Freedom Now Suite" but it's only the third work, "The Gettin'," that deals explicitly with racism.

Set to an original jazz score by Robert Glasper, "The Get-

tin'" opens with an exuberant surge of group dancing as six dancers hurl themselves this way and that in a series of daredevil leaps and turns. It's a deceptive beginning, however, as the movement evolves first into a contemplative trio for one man and two women, then to an emotional duet for two men and ultimately a final tableau of a solitary woman walking across the stage. It's not obvious whether she is triumphant or bereft but that ambiguity makes the ending all the more poignant.

Explicit references to racism are made with scenes of segregation and apartheid in the U.S. and South Africa projected against the huge backdrop. The images are so compelling, it's sometimes hard to focus on the dancers, but doing so is well worth the effort. The troupe's nine performers are exceptionally versatile, able to easily manage the physical and emotional demands of Abraham's eclectic mix of ballet, Brazilian capoeira and other contemporary dance forms.

Unlike "The Gettin'," the first two works on the program are pure dance pieces and the fact

that they don't have a clear narrative thread allows us to appreciate the diversity of Abraham's style.

"When the Wolves Came In," set to choral music by the classical composer Nico Muhly, opens with a spellbinding image of an African-American woman in an enormous auburn beehive wig and an almost ghostly Caucasian male with long white hair. Slowly they begin a sinewy duet beneath a backdrop of shadowy hooded figures, gently manipulating each other's bodies. As the ballet proceeds, three more women in beehives and two other men appear as Abraham unspools a riveting series of turns, arabesques and twists. Are the dancers aliens from another planet or some form of exotic animal life? Abraham keeps us guessing, allowing us to imbue the action with our own interpretation and meaning.

In "Hallowed," three dancers slice the air with extended arms and legs to gospel hymns by Cleo Kennedy and Bertha Gober. Jeremy "Jae" Neal is the central character, elastic and sensuous as he leads his two female partners

through a series of off-center balances, head rolls and full body gyrations. It's the shortest, most coherent ballet on the program and the most attuned to its score, demonstrating Abraham's prodigious skill in bringing music alive through movement.

ABRAHAM
IN
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San Francisco Chronicle

February 20, 2015

'PAVEMENT' DANCE REVIEW: KYLE ABRAHAM AND COMPANY A MUST-SEE

by Allan Ulrich

Where dance is concerned, the presenting schedule by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts is disappointingly (even scandalously) skimpy, but when the center gets down to business, it imports artists who matter. That's an understatement where dancer-choreographer Kyle Abraham is concerned. Thursday evening's local debut of his company, Abraham.In.Motion, in the hour-long "Pavement" heralds a remarkable talent who mingles vocabularies and musics with profoundly affecting results.

MacArthur Fellow Abraham has previously appeared solo here, most recently in Wendy Whelan's "Restless Creature" last month, but "Pavement" delivers much hotter, richer fare. The piece ambitiously traces the decline of the African American communities of

Homewood and the Hill District in Pittsburgh, and while raging in its own way, the piece also laments the dissolution of those neighborhoods and the cultural values they embodied.

Abraham takes his inspiration from John Singleton's movie "Boyz n the Hood," even borrowing bits of dialogue, but this is a movement piece that traverses its territory with enormous energy and great emotional nuance. A high chain-link fence bisects the transformed YBCA Forum. There's a basketball net and a backboard on which are projected films of urban decay. Dressed in casual clothes, Abraham saunters in alone at the beginning and dives into a brilliant hip-hop solo, dominated by flexed feet, a molten torso and astonishing thrust. The six-member, mixed-race company follows, and as the shoes come off, so do the emotional subterfuges. Eric Williams, who is white, confronts Abraham, and the tension rises every time a dancer passes another; it's like striking a match in a gasworks. Abraham's movement style overlays a hip-hop sensibility with an infusion of main-

stream American modernism. These dancers leap, roll and congeal in unison in a way that recalls Paul Taylor (nothing to be ashamed of there) and several of the dancers have studied ballet. The center of the performers' gravity keeps shifting and the effect keeps you alert.

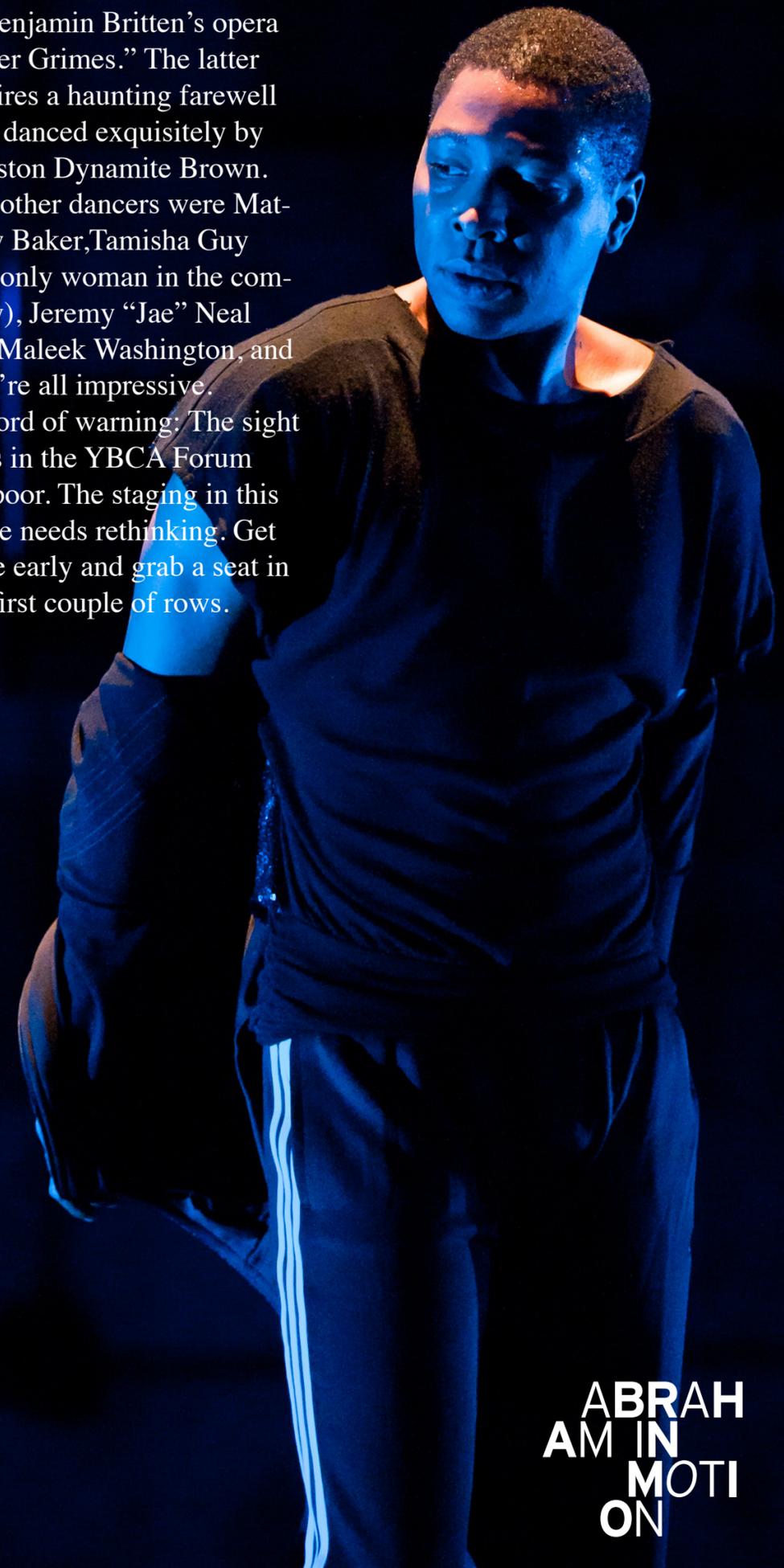
The mood intensifies. A confrontation between two men, initially hostile, melts into a kind of love duet as their fingers touch, and one performer lifts another. The dancers take turns running circles around the stage, their energy seeking an outlet.

The mood grows dark. Flashing red lights (the effect was muffled Thursday) signal the arrival of the police; bodies (including Abraham's) fall motionless to the floor. "Pavement" ends with a stunning image as bodies collapse on each other, their arms in the cuffed position behind their backs.

Sustaining the piece is Abraham's sound score, as brilliant a collage as I've heard in years. The choreographer has studied music seriously, and it shows here. Abraham patches together street sounds, Vivaldi's "Stabat Mater," classic

blues, Sam Cooke, Donny Hathaway, Bach, Ryuichi Sakamoto and the final scene of Benjamin Britten's opera "Peter Grimes." The latter inspires a haunting farewell solo danced exquisitely by Winston Dynamite Brown. The other dancers were Matthew Baker, Tamisha Guy (the only woman in the company), Jeremy "Jae" Neal and Maleek Washington, and they're all impressive.

A word of warning: The sight lines in the YBCA Forum are poor. The staging in this space needs rethinking. Get there early and grab a seat in the first couple of rows.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

ABRAHAM IN MOTION

The Washington Post

November 9, 2014
ABRAHAM.IN.MOTION'S
CHOREOGRAPHY IS
AMBITIOUS, YES, BUT
RIGHTLY SO

by Sarah Halzack



Often when the word “ambitious” is used to describe choreography, it’s a veiled way of saying that artists bit off more than they could chew, that the work became too big and aspirational for its own good.

But Abraham.In.Motion’s Saturday show at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in College Park was ambitious in the very best sense of the word: Choreographer Kyle Abraham took on complex, hot-button topics and handled them ably and honestly; he unleashed huge volumes of movement that were mind-bogglingly detailed and varied; and perhaps most importantly, he revealed himself to be hungry to keep innovating.

Abraham presented a trio of works inspired by Max Roach’s 1960 album “We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite,” which was released as the civil rights movement was building to its fever pitch. Abraham examined the relevance of the album’s themes in today’s culture. How far have we really come on racial equality? How free is any one of us in a society that is still grappling with these questions?

The set design provides one chilling answer. The backdrop, created by Glenn Ligon, is an image from a Ku Klux Klan rally. By altering the exposure and clarity of the photo, the contents of the

image are nearly indecipherable. But the pointed shape of the Klansmen’s hoods is just recognizable enough, a statement that these ugly racial prejudices are fading, but they are still there if you look closely enough.

“When the Wolves Came In” is brimming with contrasts: Movement frequently is initiated with the back of the head so the dancer looks to be diving out in space with a sense of unrestrained freedom. And yet such sequences are followed by a tableau in which one woman beckons another woman by gesturing to her like a dog owner offering a treat. The inhumanity of it is despicable.

The one frustration in this work was that the dancers were entirely imperturbable. Their movement was so intoxicating that you desperately wanted them to let you in, to show you how these thorny issues have affected their own hearts and minds. But they never really did. Abraham’s voice is loud and clear in this work, but the dancers are not really heard.

Thankfully, we get more from them in “Hallowed,” a short, tightly knit dance that is set to a cappella gospel songs. The movement here was syncopated and specific, with the dancers’ spines synchronously melting into ooze and their arms crossing and uncrossing like in a game of cat’s cradle. The dancers hardly travel

through space, a choice that reminds us that the forward march of progress sometimes comes in fits and starts.

The final work, “The Gettin’,” is intriguing, though it is perhaps the most unfocused of this suite of dances. The work seemed to hit a climax at least twice, first when Jeremy Neal and Matthew Baker ceremoniously stripped off their shirts, revealing the purest versions of themselves, after a duet full of manipulation and aggression. But later, when tiny Tamisha Guy bounded around the stage, back to the audience, clawing and scratching at an imaginary foe, suddenly the dance seemed to again swell to an apex. Better pacing and shading could make this already powerful work hit even harder.

The feel of the whole evening was refreshingly of-the-moment: The steps were new and original, and Abraham’s tone felt relevant to today’s conversation about race. Even the slinky jumpsuit costumes worn in “Hallowed” were on-trend and Instagram-worthy. In an art form that is struggling to lure younger audiences, it was a welcome treat to see a program that was so inviting to a new generation of theater-goers.

The Boston Globe

OCTOBER 12, 2014

KYLE ABRAHAM'S EN-GROSSING 'WHEN THE WOLVES CAME IN'

by Karen Campbell

With prestigious awards and a 2013 MacArthur “genius grant” in his pocket, choreographer Kyle Abraham couldn't be hotter right now. But hot doesn't mean easy, as Friday night's challenging program at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston proved. A co-presentation of the ICA and World Music/CRASHarts, “When the Wolves Came In” takes on nothing less than civil rights, and it's one of the most provocative, puzzling, and engrossing dance programs to hit Boston in some time. It's also spectacularly performed by the company's eight dancers.

The three works on the program are inspired by drummer/composer Max Roach's stirring 1960 protest album, “We Insist! Freedom Now Suite,” created with writer/singer Oscar Brown Jr. As a “Black gay American man,” Abraham writes in his director's note, he set out to create a program “to live in a skin

well aware of the cyclical hardships of our history, and the very present fear of an unknowable future.” Little in the program is particularly literal, but Abraham laces the three works with subtle, potent imagery that provokes a lot more questions than it answers, which I suspect is the choreographer's goal. In the eponymous opener, “Where the Wolves Came In,” set to choral music by Nico Muhly, identity and autonomy get explored beneath a backdrop of shadowy hooded figures. Some of the dancers wear foot-high wigs,

one of which is ceremoniously removed, both a kind of unshackling and unveiling. Abraham unspools a fascinating combination of styles — arabesques and elegant balletic turns one moment, booty shakes, cocky struts, and weighted walks the next. Bodies stooped and bent, as if under great weight, seem to powerfully regain their vigor on strength of will. Periodically dancers are on all fours, like creatures harnessed and tamed. In the trio “Hallowed,” set to spirituals, vigorous shifts of weight and controlled, off-

center balances suggest determination and fortitude. Phrases are punctuated by a powerful gestural vocabulary — hands that clench, flutter, and point, arms slicing, heads rolling. Jeremy “Jae” Neal is a powerhouse of isolations that ripple through his limbs and torso. “The Gettin' ” has the most concrete allusions, with the ensemble costumed in old-fashioned street clothes and backdrops evoking the black/white separation of apartheid and US segregation. Jetés and kick jumps segue into tumbles and jazzy sequences

full of brisk athleticism and earthy weight. The central male duet morphs from unity to confrontation to sensuality, calling to mind the ongoing struggle for gay rights. Robert Glasper contributed original music, but the ending is straight from Roach's suite. To the rousing strains of “Freedom Song,” the dancers finally get to cut loose. However, the final tableaux is more solemn, a solitary woman center stage as the singer intones, “I am all the ways I've survived . . .”



ABRAHAM
IN
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HYPERALLERGIC

OCTOBER 10, 2014
DANCING THROUGH THE
QUESTION OF FREEDOM

by Emma Wiseman

Whisper, listen, whisper, listen.
Whispers say we're free.
Rumors flyin', must be lyin'. Can
it really be?
Can't conceive it, can't believe it.
But that's what they say.
Slave no longer, slave no longer,
this is Freedom Day.

These lyrics come from "Freedom Day," a track from Max Roach's 1960 album *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* and a major influence on choreographer Kyle Abraham/Abraham. In *Motion*, who premiered his new work "The Watershed" at New York Live Arts last week, part of the culmination of his tenure as that theater's Resident Commissioned Artist. In a director's note, Abraham references Max Roach's response when asked about "Freedom Day": "Freedom itself was so hard to grasp ... we don't really understand what it is to be free." "The Watershed" remains skeptical about the nature of freedom in what Abraham terms a "polyphobic society." As a black gay American man, Abraham inves-

tigates questions of identity on many levels; as a choreographer, he's unafraid to face these issues of race, gender, and societal oppression head-on.

Glenn Ligon, the renowned visual artist who designed the sets for "The Watershed," said in a 2011 interview, "We don't agree on what images mean; that's their power." In "The Watershed," Ligon's wood-paneled set acts as a backdrop for images, mostly projections, that are far from ambiguous. From Shirley Temple dancing with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson to white policemen beating a black woman on the side of a busy highway, to projected text quoting blatantly ignorant opinions of blacks, the images presented to the audience are compelling and at times appalling, but not open to interpretation. Rather, the power of the piece lies in its onstage imagery, which, though sometimes similarly transparent, offers the audience a wider window through which to view the work.

"The Watershed" moves through history in two acts. At first, a warmly lit stage with a Spanish-moss-draped tree and dancers wearing long, old-fashioned-looking skirts and vests suggest the American South of the 19th century. Eight performers beautifully execute luscious, sweeping phrases, shifting from duets to trios to group movement. (Abraham himself is the ninth dancer, entering for

brief one-on-one interactions and show-stealing solo moments.) The two white men in the piece at times seem to play aggressors both choreographically and theatrically — one violently hacks a watermelon apart with a cleaver — advancing a more pointed narrative. At others, they seamlessly transition back into the ensemble, where they couple up with both men and women, sometimes restraining, sometimes supporting, the choreography asking new questions about sexuality and identity. In a striking moment, a lone woman slowly bounds in a circle around the stage, repeatedly being held back by a man; my first thought was of a runaway slave, but Abraham gives the audience time to ponder the scenario more expansively: What am I running away from? Where am I running to?

The second act of "The Watershed" begins with a heavy chain dropping from the ceiling onto the stage, and we are instantly beyond the present day, in the future. The physical shackles have fallen away, but the presence of the chain throughout the rest of the piece — as well as strips of white light resembling the bars of a cage — speaks of an ongoing suffering. The lighting is stark, the tree is bare, the PVC pipes that make up its trunk and branches gleam. The dancers, in homogenous, monochrome costumes, perform rapid arm and upper body move-

ments with ferocious energy. The choreography at times references African dance. A specific shoulder roll and head nod that was planted like a seed by Abraham, in drag, at the beginning of the piece, has now grown and spread to become part of the frenzied tapestry of motion. Abraham is portraying a different world, but one in which the struggle for equality, justice, and respect is ongoing. He is asking us to consider that "Freedom Day" has not arrived yet.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

The New York Times

September 28, 2014

DANCE REVIEW: REMINDERS OF THE PROTEST ERA STIRRED INTO A 'POSTMODERN GUMBO'

by Siobhan Burke

In the eight years since he founded his company, Abraham.In.Motion, Kyle Abraham has been mixing modes of movement to form his own; he cleverly calls his choreography “a post-modern gumbo.” Its sources range from ballet to Brazilian capoeira, from the Lindy Hop to the '90s raves where, growing up in Pittsburgh, he got his start as a dancer. He has hallmarks, favorite moves: a head roll casting ripples down through the shoulders and arms; floor-skimming scoots with one leg in arabesque; squalls that erupt from the torso while the feet stand their ground, the body fighting against itself or something unseen.

That vocabulary sometimes aids Mr. Abraham's message and sometimes seems arbi-

trary, lathered on too thick or lacking structure. But when it works, it really works. On Thursday at New York Live Arts, he presented debuts of three pieces under the heading “When the Wolves Came In,” the second of two programs that he has created as the theater's resident commissioned artist. (The first, “The Watershed,” opened on Tuesday.) Both programs draw inspiration from the pivotal 1960 jazz album and civil rights statement “We Insist! Max Roach's ‘Freedom Now Suite.’” But it was Thursday's final work, “The Gettin’,” set to live jazz by Robert Glasper, that most deftly captured the spirit of protest and resilience in Roach's music.

“The Gettin’” begins with music alone, played by Mr. Glasper (piano), Vicente Archer (bass) and Otis Brown III (drums), with Charenee Wade's searing vocals. (Mr. Glasper's composition combines passages from “We Insist!” with his own material.) If Ms. Wade sings of slavery — “Ain't but two things on my mind: driva man and quitin' time,” she wails — the dancing that surges forth, as

a Latin beat kicks in, is all about breaking free. It's hard to pin down who does what in this initial blast of movement, such is the cyclone of comings and goings, of flying legs and dangerous leaps and the blur of color produced by Karen Young's 1950s-inspired costumes. But individuals soon come into focus. Connie Shiau's spry, darting solo is like a distillation of dissent. Jeremy Jae Neal and Matthew Baker could be rivals or mischievous friends as they scurry side by side, victors or victims as they slowly remove their shirts to Ms. Wade's violent screams.

Mr. Abraham's use of photographs and films is more judicious here than in “The Watershed,” if still blunt. Images of apartheid, like a sign declaring “White Area,” materialize over Glenn Ligon's eerie backdrop of cloaked silhouettes retreating (or advancing?) across a bright white landscape.

That backdrop sets the tone, too, for the two pieces in the program's first half: “When the Wolves Came In” and “Hallowed.” In “Wolves,” seven dancers, some in bee-

hive wigs, manipulate one another both tenderly and aggressively. An onstage costume change signals the start of “Hallowed,” a pensive trio for Tamisha Guy, Catherine Ellis Kirk and Mr. Neal to gospel hymns by Cleo Kennedy and Bertha Gober. Their gestures suggest a hesitation, maybe guilt, related to religion. But only in “The Gettin’” does the body speak loud and clear.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

September 25, 2014

Choreographer Kyle Abraham's exploration of identity succeeds

by Alexandra Lake

A white man slowly slices a watermelon. Liquid fills the cut and overflows, dripping down the round surface of the fruit before it is split open, revealing the raw center. The butcher's knife withdraws and then violently hacks at one half with loud strikes, leaving the other resting, red and hewn and gaping at us. Two women sit still and emotionless, watching. In the foreground, a duo of black men contort and contract about each other, at times in their closeness appearing to be lovers, at others breaking and tearing each other to the floor.

This is just a taste of the portrayal of race and racism found in the "The Watershed," an evening-length work for nine dancers choreographed by Kyle Abraham in collaboration with Abraham. In.Motion. Described as an exploration of cross-cultural fights for freedom from the

Civil War to the present day, the piece explores much more than race, however, conveying struggles of gender identity, homosexuality, brutality, and voice in two acts.

Set before a background of wooden boards, the varying shades of wood heighten awareness of the performers' skin tones and find skillful complement in their costumes. For the first act, dancers are dressed in neutral tones, playing off their skin either in high contrast or near match. What the fabric hides is almost as important as what it uncovers—a woman's erratic fit upon the ground would not seem so vulnerable without her white dress riding up to reveal her dark, bare legs writhing frantically beneath.

Video projected on the background is at moments trivially disturbing—a host of mimes in black face—and at others highly engrossing, such as when two lovers undress and footage of a homeless woman being beaten by a cop plays on a loop, filling the entire space. Additionally, the music shepherds us through the changing dynamics of the piece. From the opening soulful grooves of Otis Redding, the sound transforms through

periods of ragged, straining strings to industrial noise to the terrifying snarling of dogs in the dark.

The dancers possess their roles with absolute confidence, allowing us to see different moments of their experiences. Straight lines and hard angles give way to fluid turns and falls. Dancers play off each other's weight in seemingly impossible balances—at one point two foreheads press together to keep the dancers from crashing to

the ground, the physical differences in size and stature making for a surprising series of catches, falls, and caresses. An exploration in freedoms that seems at times historical, but never dated, "The Watershed" gives ample opportunity to reflect upon where different communities have been and where they are, what has changed, what remains the same, and what fights are still to come.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

village VOICE

SEPTEMBER 3, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHER KYLE
ABRAHAM COPES WITH
PROSPERITY

by Elizabeth Zimmer

You'd think that winning just about every big prize the American grant-making community offers would put to rest any financial anxiety plaguing choreographer Kyle Abraham. Close to a million dollars in cash and in-kind services between 2012 and 2018 should take care of his dance company's money worries, you'd expect, at least for a while. But you'd be wrong. "You have to come from money to not worry about money," he says, enumerating the new expenses that come with his troupe's recent growth.

The choreographer, whose troupe, Abraham.In.Motion, emerged as a contender for attention and awards about five years ago, makes a major shift with new works later this month at New York Live Arts (NYLA), where he's the resident commissioned artist. Until now Abraham's dances have centered on the travails of urban American youth — coming-of-age issues among homeboys (and -girls), both gay and straight.

The first of Abraham's pieces to garner broad attention, *The Radio Show* (2010), blended the soundtrack of a Pittsburgh adolescence spent listening to a local pop station with a chronicle of his father's descent into Alzheimer's disease. The powerful *Pavement* (2012) drew on themes from the groundbreaking 1991 film *Boyz n the Hood* and W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, embedding them in an exploration of the fraught lives of urban youth.

But the 50th anniversary of the famed *Freedom Riders* has stirred him to action in a broader context. Abraham typically likes to listen to music for extended periods before he starts devising movement, and says he was already immersed in drummer Max Roach's 1960 protest album, *We Insist: Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*, when he visited the Hector Pieterse Museum in Soweto, South Africa. (The 13-year-old Pieterse was shot and killed during the 1976 uprising protesting the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in black schools.)

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visited the Hector Pieterse Museum in Soweto, South Africa. (The 13-year-old Pieterse was shot and killed during the 1976 uprising protesting the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in black schools.)

"*We Insist* is really an album of a painful history that is very much connected with its present," notes Abraham. "The emotion and frustration you feel in that record connects me with these preconceived notions that things are 'OK' now... and that we're all seen as equal. But even looking at the events [in Ferguson, Missouri], we know that is far from true."

Abraham's new dances move to a much larger historical and aesthetic milieu, inspired by the Roach album, which celebrated the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation and burgeoning civil rights movements in South Africa and the United States. *The Watershed*, a full-length work, blends '60s R&B with contemporary classical and hip-hop, juxtaposing social dance with choreographed movement.

The second NYLA program, *When the Wolves Came In*, includes a dance to a choral work by Nico Muhly; another created with jazz musician Robert Glasper; and a trio, set to gospel songs, exploring queer urban dance aesthetics. Conceptual artist Glenn Ligon provides visual design for all four pieces. "The Watershed is a metaphor for tension in the history of a struc-

ture," Abraham says. "There's a duality. You're thinking about what happened to Native Americans; I'm very well aware of the fact that I'm a black, gay American man. Things in each of those signifiers have certain freedoms to them. At the same time, I'm aware of the struggles of all those things, and all of the opposing forces. We're fighting for the right to be married, but in other countries they're fighting for the right to be gay; women are fighting for their independence. I'm trying to be inclusive in a way that doesn't make a really watered-down dance. You get a sense of history and struggle and relevance."

In the five hours I spent with Abraham one summer afternoon, the most startling moment came when he shifted suddenly from his calm, educated diction to the cadences of a Pittsburgh thug kid. It's something he does in lecture-demonstrations, to make a point about his upbringing on a border between middle- and working-class neighborhoods. The second most startling was his confession that though his financial picture is improved, "I do not spend money. When we tour, I only bring what I can get in a carry-on. I don't want to have to pay for shipping."

In rehearsal, Abraham's calm demeanor sometimes gives way, erupting into fits of giggles. A resident of Boerum Hill with a long-distance sweetheart in Los Ange-

les, it's safe to say he's a happy man.

"I actually really love to work," he tells me. "I don't like to make mistakes. I love feeling that I'm at my best, so it's hard to sleep when there's more work to be done." A self-described "big rave kid from Pittsburgh," Abraham came out when he was 15. His style fuses the abrupt tropes of hip-hop with sustained, lyrical phrases more typical of formal dance. "I want to make something that's realistic, honest, rooted in realism. There's a certain longing, a perspective based on my being a black gay man from Pittsburgh."

Trained in classical music and visual arts, Abraham came late to dance — specifically, after watching the Joffrey Ballet perform *Billboards*, which he attended because it featured a soundtrack by Prince. He graduated from SUNY Purchase and later earned his MFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, finishing with \$200,000 in student-loan debt. His recent winnings — the MacArthur Fellowship, a United States Artists award, the NYLA residency, and a 2012 prize from Jacob's Pillow — helped reduce that debt, but it still looms; he told Katie Couric in a 2013 interview that he was reliant on food stamps as recently as a few years ago.

ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

DECEMBER 7, 2012

BEHIND THE SCENES OF
ANOTHER NIGHT:
CHOREOGRAPHER KYLE
ABRAHAM'S ALVIN AILEY
DEBUT

By REBECCA BENGAL

On Wednesday afternoon, choreographer Kyle Abraham, finalizing his look for a curtain call, rips out the price tags from the wide-leg tuxedo pants and the white shirt emblazoned with a large blurred yellow flower he's chosen from *Comme des Garçons*. "I wanted to look like a Japanese artist," says Abraham, flashing a handsome smile—he's been known to perform bare-chested in a long pink tutu in his 2006 breakout work, *Inventing Pookie Jenkins*, and in plaid flannel and sneakers in this year's *Pavement*. (He's saving his Nike high-tops for later because after that evening's world premiere of his work *Another Night* for the Alvin Ailey American Dance

Rei Kawakubo isn't the only avant reference Abraham lets creep into the City Center. Later that evening, duos and trios of dancers, clad in a Merce Cunningham-like rainbow of color—green, orange, red, blue—flash out across the stage, a duo here, a trio here, taking flight, in lightning-fast movements punctuated by layers of thunderous drumming, Art Blakey's hard-bop improv rendition of Dizzy Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia." Without warning the music downshifts into a sax solo. Jacqueline Green, sultry as that sax line in a turquoise swingy skirt slit up to there, reenters the stage with siren elegance. She's soon joined by Jamar Roberts, clad in purple, checking her out. Dancing beside her, he begins to mirror her moves; this is the "flirt," like a moment out of Cunningham's tautly structured *Duets*. They simultaneously drop into a melting half dip, each hooks one ankle behind the other leg, they share a quick, telling glance, and then they're step in step.

"I just wanted to make a fun dance," Abraham says. It might seem a departure, given the reputation he's built for creating dance narratives that freshly

Abraham.In.Motion's most recent full-length work, *Pavement*, which premiered at Harlem Stage last month, reimaged the film *Boyz n the Hood*, moving it out of south central Los Angeles to the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, where Abraham grew up, and replacing John Singleton's hip-hop sound track with Bach, Vivaldi, Mississippi Fred McDowell. Yet it would be almost impossible for the 35-year-old dancer and choreographer to finish 2012 on anything other than a high note—or rather, a high note accompanied by the explosive polyrhythms of Blakey's late-fifties recording.

The premiere of *Another Night*, which will run throughout December at Manhattan's City Center before its international tour, caps off what Abraham rightly calls "an insanely amazing year"—one in which he received the Jacob's Pillow Dance Award, a \$280,000 New York Live Arts fellowship (funding two years of salary and the production of a new work), and a \$50,000 USA Fellows prize.

"I think he's going to be a very important voice of our generation," says

What Abraham brings to Ailey is an avant-garde aesthetic, a original and politically minded downtown sensibility that doesn't distinguish between genres but freely draws on a vocabulary that is as much Merce and Martha as it is Eadweard Muybridge and Michael Jackson. In Abraham's own words, his style is a "postmodern gumbo."

With his music choice for *Another Night*, he takes a conscious risk—the sudden tempo switches of improv jazz don't easily lend themselves to dance. But Art Blakey was a Pittsburgh native, and the nod to their shared hometown continues an important thread in Abraham's work (he began his training in the city as a teenager after seeing his first dance, the Joffrey Ballet performing to music by Prince). "Pavement and *Another Night* look at the ebbs and flows of the city," Abraham says. "Pavement was Pittsburgh in the nineties, all dilapidated buildings. But it has a strong arts scene that was so vibrant in the fifties, especially for jazz, and that's part of what I wanted to reference in *Another Night*. I wanted to make something celebra-

Abraham also strove to tap into the Ailey dancers' legendary athleticism and prowess, conveying both the power and the joy of Blakey's music. "It's an obnoxiously detailed dance," he admits. "My question is always, can they get to the place with the material where they're tapping into that jazz sleight of hand, where they're moving as fast as the Tasmanian devil, yet looking calm and collected and like they're having a good time?"

After dress rehearsal that afternoon, he and his assistant choreographers give notes. "Keep it flirty, keep it carefree," Abraham instructs, walking among the dancers. "It's all a conversation—stay open, acknowledge the people around you. It's like this"—he mimes a prance across a crowded dance floor with a coy nod over one shoulder—"Oh, hey, when'd you show up? 'What you doin' tonight?'"



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

NOVEMBER 11, 2012

"BOYZ N THE HOOD"
REIMAGINED AS DANCE

By ANDREW BOYNTON

The thirty-five-year-old choreographer Kyle Abraham has come a long way in just a few years. In 2006, he established his company, Abraham.In.Motion, and since then has produced dances that have earned him awards and critical acclaim. In December, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre will première a work that it commissioned from him. For someone whose career has taken off in such a big way, though, he retains a strong connection to his Pittsburgh roots, and shows great integrity in his dance-making, both of which were evident in his newest work, "Pavement," which Abraham presented recently at Harlem Stage.

Abraham, who is African-American, went to high school in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, a historically black neighborhood, and in several of his previous works he drew on his experiences there. For "Pavement," he went back to 1991, to reimagine the film "Boyz n the Hood," about gangs in South Central Los Angeles, which was released that summer. He used the film as a springboard for examining life in Pittsburgh's African-American communities in the Hill District and East Liberty Homewood and reflecting on the state of the black American experience in the two decades since its release.

But Abraham's conception was even more sweeping. He also wanted to look at the history that had preceded the strife represented in "Boyz n the Hood," and found a pertinent source in "The Souls of Black Folk," the 1903 book by W. E. B. Du Bois, whose essays became instrumental in African-Americans' struggle for equality in the twentieth century. Du Bois's text made no appearance in "Pavement," but Abraham included a quote from it in the program, which hovered over the dance: "Men call the shadow prejudice, and learnedly explain it as a natural defense of culture against barbarism, learning against ignorance, purity against crime, the 'higher' against the 'lower' races." In the light of Du Bois's words from more than a century ago, the realities as depicted in the film are

sobering. From the perspective of 1991, when the ravages of H.I.V., crack addiction, and gang genocide were entrenched, not much seems to have gone right.

In spite of the complexity of such a high-minded idea, Abraham has created a work of great subtlety and beauty. Much of this comes from its setting and décor. Harlem Stage's Gatehouse venue, on West 135th Street, occupies a former pumping station for the Croton Aqueduct system, built in the eighteen-eighties. The two-hundred-seat theatre there, which opened in 2006, retains the buff and red brick of the original walls, and a patterned arch over the rear of the stage forms a pushed-back proscenium. Having already placed us in one of New York's preëminent African-American neighborhoods, in an industrial structure, Abraham and his set designer, Dan Scully, then added to the atmosphere: a basketball backboard and hoop hang high up in one corner; the gray marley floor has a bright-orange border marking its perimeter, enlarging on the basketball-court imagery; the orange square is echoed on the backboard. Before the show, the backboard was filled with a projected black-and-white image of buildings posted with "No Loitering" signs, and exuberant hip-hop played.

Once "Pavement" began, though, the only thing really binding us to an urban environment of 1991 was the costumes: casual pants and shorts, tanks and tees, and the plaid shirts that were so ubiquitous then, worn loosely buttoned or tied around the waist. The hip-hop music stopped. The first sounds we heard were from Mississippi Fred McDowell's blues song "What's the Matter Now?," which Abraham cleverly used to point us back to the nineteen-fifties, when the Hill District and East Liberty Homewood still attracted big-name performers, a heyday that soon passed. The slow, lush cadences set a melancholic tone. In a solo, Abraham moved confidently, calmly, his arms and legs swooping and slashing. The effect was hypnotic. But, like the good years in Pittsburgh, the lulling mood gave way to trouble. Other dancers entered, and, in a move that was repeated throughout "Pavement," one of them took Abraham to the floor, placing him face down and joining his hands behind his back, in a mock handcuffing—a gesture of domination and violence, but performed with a kind of tenderness, like that of a mother putting her child to bed.

Ambiguity and unexpected juxtapositions marked "Pavement" from start to finish. The choreography that Abraham created for his six dancers, and the music he used, kept us pleasingly off balance. Most of the phrases in "Pavement" were muscular modern, with balletic flourishes and a sprinkling of funk. As a group of friends who attempt to navigate the uncertain terrain they inhabit, the dancers—Matthew Baker, Rena Butler, Chalvar Monteiro, Jeremy Neal, Maleek Washington, and Eric Williams—were impressive. They are all clearly accomplished technicians, but low-key and restrained, never overselling the movement. They also proved adept at switching gears from dance to theatre and back, as when Neal and Washington slipped in a fist bump in a more traditional duet; it came out of nowhere and vanished just as quickly, adding complexity to the men's relationship, and effective because it was so brief.

For his score, Abraham employed a mixture of classical composers (Bach, Caldara, Britten, Vivaldi, Handel), some contemporary instrumental music, and standards and R. & B. None of the selections were very long—only four or five minutes, at most—and the piece resembled a film that jumps from scene to scene, revealing mutable relationships and alliances. We got to know these individuals, people trying to find a way out of the neighborhood, or to hold on to their friends, or just to stay alive. The dancers were skilled interpreters of Abraham's small and subtle passages; several times, we saw a riveting, awkward-seeming lift in which one man slowly hoisted another up and changed his grip on him over and over, painstakingly turning him, so that the lifted man appeared to be floating. In a work that touched on death and strife, it was as though a soul was leaving a body.

Throughout "Pavement," the film footage projected on the backboard—simple images of buildings and streets in Pittsburgh—kept changing. Like the rest of the choices that Abraham and Scully (who also did the lighting) made, their approach to the footage was judicious. It never distracted, always reminded us of where we were. Similar details were used sparingly. Plastic crates scattered on the sides of the stage provided places for the dancers, in character, to rest. At one point, Butler, the lone female in "Pavement," a grounding sort of Everywoman, gathered the colorful sneakers that the

men had taken off and tied them to a rope lying on the floor upstage, which was then raised up, remaining there for the duration of the piece.

Shoeless, the men became softer. Abraham did not seem to be playing with gender roles in "Pavement," but much of the music was in the form of arias sung by the young French soprano countertenor Philippe Jaroussky, whose remarkable high, clear voice evoked the castrati of centuries ago—a provocative backdrop for a work based in a testosterone-filled milieu. As in any insular male world, close proximity can foster sensitivity and warmth as much as it can competition and conflict. The opportunity to exploit these possibilities was there in "Pavement," but Abraham held back, and just let the music play.

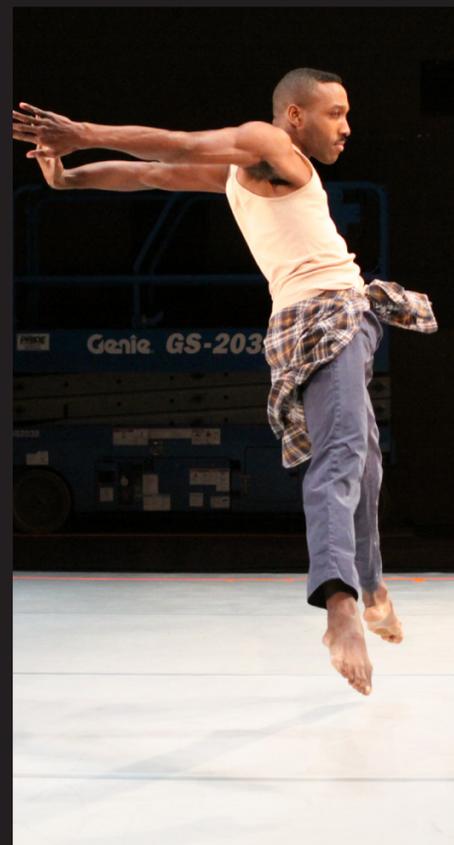
The dancers, though young, proved themselves to be gifted actors. Onstage, they occasionally mixed in casual chatter with their dancing, and did it unself-consciously; the roughhousing and fighting appeared real without looking stacy, and always seamlessly blended back into pure dance. Williams and Washington, in a combative duet, managed to convey an undercurrent of pain; though they were often in unison, what came across was sadness, or a feeling that they stood on the edge of a precipice. Washington is a captivating performer, a formidable dancer who is also capable of carefully modulated expressions. In a tender duet with Butler, he ended standing over her as she lay on the ground, his stance and his face signalling a split within himself: threatening and protective at the same time.

As a performer, Abraham is equally comfortable with the theatrical elements. In one of the longer set pieces, he stood on the dark stage as a red strobe circled at the downstage edge. This nighttime police action was punctuated by a monologue in which Abraham cajoled the other dancers as they filtered in: "Come on, man, help me. You know me, we live in the same building. Help me out right quick." This was the most overtly dramatic passage in the piece, but Abraham stylized it, repeating his entreaties in different combinations, and the dancing of the others in the dark gave the scene a dreamlike quality. It was real and yet not real.

The ground was always shifting. In a recurring motif, the dancers ran around the stage, keeping the same rhythm, whether it sped up or slowed down. The group ran as one—but who was leading, who was falling behind? In

the gang life of East Liberty Homewood and the Hill District, as in that of South Central L.A. and Harlem, a friend may have to kill you in order to be accepted; love can survive, even thrive, or you could lose everything. By including dialogue from "Boyz n the Hood," Abraham gave us a more concrete framework in which to understand the piece, but his references to it were always oblique, always tempered. At one point, Abraham layered Vivaldi's "Stabat Mater" over a scene in the film in which a mother wails when her dead son is brought home.

An operatic intensity seemed apt for a work with such potent inspirations. Late in "Pavement," the backboard footage showed a building demolition in slow motion, shrapnel flying gracefully through the air. Abraham was face down on the floor, his hands behind his back. One by one, as Sam Cooke sang, the dancers entered and laid themselves down in the handcuffed position, or lay on others. They could have been arrestees, or corpses. But then one body, then another, would wriggle out from under those above, and lie on top. Stacks of bodies breathed. Butler, lying under Neal, turned over to face him. As Donny Hathaway's "Someday We'll All Be Free" played, what seemed like a grave now seemed like a place of comfort. Pavement is a hard, unforgiving thing, but for some people it's also home.



AUGUST 11, 2012

ON PITTSBURGH AND THE PEACE SIGN

By JULIE BLOOM

WHEN it comes to cities that fuel the creative fire, Pittsburgh isn't usually the first to spring to mind. But don't tell Kyle Abraham. This dancer and choreographer has been mining that town for material his entire career. Born there into the hip-hop culture of the late 1970s, Mr. Abraham, 34, mixes that influence with classical music and movement training. In 2010 he caught the eye of the dance world with "The Radio Show," which was inspired by a Pittsburgh station and earned him a Bessie Award. It dealt with race and identity, issues he's explored throughout his work. Then came "Live! The Realist MC," loosely based on the story of Pinocchio and an autobiographical look at coming out in a hip-hop world.

This year has propelled him into another realm. Among many other accolades, he was awarded the Jacob's Pillow Dance Award in June. He's choreographing a piece for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater for a December premiere. In November at Harlem Stages, his company, Abraham.In.Motion, will present "Pavement," drawing

on the 1991 movie "Boyz n the Hood," and Pittsburgh of course.

As he sat outside a cafe in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, where he now lives, Mr. Abraham, with his baseball cap stylishly askew — "Pittsburgh" set off in gold — talked with Julie Bloom about his latest successes. These are excerpts from their conversation.

Q. What's this year been like?

A. It's been really insane and exhausting.

Q. Has this changed how you see yourself?

A. Performing is starting to get to a scary place for me, which happened before. I kind of was having these moments where I felt like if I messed up at all, I was ruining this artist's work, their livelihood. So I started feeling this kind of pressure more recently because of all this great stuff that's come up — to not mess up.

Q. What is it about Pittsburgh?

A. I think for the most part we have a lot of hometown pride. It's such an amazing city. It's very blue collar. It's very art friendly. Most of the public schools have this amazing diversity.

Q. Tell me about "Pavement."

A. I was thinking about these two historically black neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, and

the ebbs and flows of where they've been culturally and where we in general are as a country.

Q. What other artists are you paying attention to?

A. I'm obsessed with Faye Driscoll. Remember "In Living Color"? "You can't say nothing wrong about Miss Jenkins." It's like that. You can't say nothing wrong about Faye Driscoll. Ralph Lemon is my idol. But music is my biggest passion. Frank Ocean's "Pyramids" is on repeat. That kind of stuff with Frank Ocean makes me cry.

Q. How did you get started?

A. The first dance performance I saw was Joffrey Ballet doing "Billboards" to Prince. I never would have known about ballet or anything if it wasn't for Prince, so I went to see them in Pittsburgh when I was 16. One of the friends [with me] was a dancer. She was like, you should audition for the musical in high school. I had long hair, like Digable Planets, and they were doing a Caribbean musical. I got in as a dancer.

Q. What's happening with your hair now?

A. I just thought, I don't have to perform for the whole month of August. If I ever just wanted to play, this is the time. It's from the early '90s. I used to have the map of Africa with a peace sign. My favorite rap group was Three Times Dope, so I had a 3XD. That look is coming back. I love it.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

DECEMBER 22, 2011

BEST DANCE CONCERT

by JANE VRANISH

Pittsburgh dance is in a growth spurt, a good thing for the art form. But that meant, due to scheduling jams on weekends, it wasn't possible to see it all. It also meant that it was harder than ever to pick a Top 10. With a nod to other contenders like Gia Cacalano, Nicole Canuso, Heidi Latsky and Staycee Pearl dance project, the list was undeniably a hair-splitter as never before.

1. Nora Chipaumire (August Wilson Center for African American Culture, March 8): The title by this Zimbabwean-born artist is a mouthful: lions will roar, swans will fly, angels will wrestle heaven, rains will break: gukurahundi. The performance was also an eyeful, filled with Ms. Chipaumire's gloriously authentic movement and a mesmerizing video projection that swirled around it. And it was an earful, courtesy of Thomas Mapfumo, the legendary Afropop pioneer and The Blacks Unlimited. The emotional impact of this African odyssey still resonates.

2. Paul Taylor Dance Company (Pittsburgh Dance Council,

Byham Theater, Oct. 22): He is a modern master, the leading choreographer of his generation. We got a swell overlook of his extensive repertoire with "Mercuric Tidings" (1982), "Piazzolla Caldera" (1997) and "Three Dubious Memories" (2010), all magnificently performed by those singular Taylor dancers. No one else delivers such a blend of humanity, humor and mathematical intellect.

3. Stephen Petronio Dance Company (PDC, Byham, Jan. 22): Maybe Mr. Taylor offered a view of 50-plus years and Mr. Petronio weighed in at only his 25th anniversary. Maybe that's why there was this sense of urban urgency in his New York-laden choreography. All kidding aside, it was all delivered with a clarity and energy that grabbed the stage.

4. Abraham.In.Motion (Kelly-Strayhorn Theater, Nov. 18): Kyle Abraham is the biggest choreographic force coming out of Pittsburgh and has taken a prominent place as a must-see choreographer on the New York scene. In "Live! The Realest MC," a hip-hop take on Pinocchio, he did a star turn as the bullied puppet/boy. Consider this a two-fer -- Mr. Abraham also performed at the August Wilson Center May 21 with his previous hit, "The Radio Show," choreographically compelling although unfortunately marred by numerous lighting errors that stopped the performance. But I don't think Mr. Abraham

minds keeping company with the likes of the venerable artists ahead of him on this list.

5. Pennsylvania Dance Theatre (Kelly-Strayhorn, Sept. 9): German expressionist Andre Koslowski's physical theater work, "por la blanda arena," still vividly transports its seemingly disparate images of roses, body parts and wet tissue. A work with brush strokes of absurdist brilliance.

6. newMoves Festival (Kelly-Strayhorn, May 12-15): In its third year, this festival attracted a savvy audience of dance lovers and artistic adventurers. The overall choreographic standard went up, and the festival expanded to other sites, a real achievement for KST.

7. Attack Theatre (New Hazlett Theater, Jan. 21): This program was simply called Show #58, which was an accomplishment in itself. It nimbly stretched from "Typeset," a nifty little dance noir piece, to an educational video game and a minimalist psycho-dance. Because the Attackers like to turn things upside down, it all ended with "Beginnings" and, of course, included the company's terrific house band, Dave Eggar and Deoro.

8. Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre (Benedum Center, April 15): Even though the PBT dancers don't necessarily train in the Balanchine style, they dug deep to tackle some masterworks in the dramatic "The

Prodigal Son" and abstract "Agon," with a nifty "Sylvia Pas de Deux" thrown into the mix.

9. Quantum Theatre (East Liberty YMCA, March 24): So "Maria de Buenos Aires" was technically an opera produced by a theater group. But the essential underpinnings came from the dance. Composed by lord of the tango Astor Piazzolla and rendered by Quantum Theatre, both Quantum director Karla Boos and Attack Theatre's Michele de la Reza contributed mightily to a production that constantly moved with all of its essential elements in sync.

10. August Wilson Center Dance Ensemble (August Wilson Center, Jan. 23): Many an American dance company would kill for the kind of programming that artistic director Greer Jones conjured up in AWCDE's first year. With premieres by Kyle Abraham, Antonio Brown and Darrell Grand Moultrie, this young and exciting company had a ready-made, built-in touring program, "The Dynamic Men of Dance," that helped to launch its early success.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

DECEMBER 2011

TAKING OFF

by SIOBHAN BURKE

In high school, before he ever took a formal dance class, Kyle Abraham was a regular on the rave scene in his hometown of Pittsburgh. When he wasn't practicing cello or taking visual art classes, he went clubbing.

"My friends and I would be the only people dancing all night," recalls the 33-year-old Abraham, artistic director of Abraham.In.Motion, the New York-based company he launched in 2006. "People thought that doing drugs was how you would stay dancing. But we never touched the drugs. The key was to use the music as a drug."

Those nights of losing himself on the dance floor—combined with his conservatory education at SUNY Purchase and stints dancing for choreographers like David Dorfman and Bill T. Jones—have given Abraham his unique choreographic touch. In works like his Bessie Award-winning *The Radio Show* (2010) and his in-progress *Live! The Realest MC*, he delivers as much pure pleasure as emotional complexity, whether delving into themes of gender, racial identity, and community, or letting his dancers just dance.

While Abraham's movement

palette ranges from Cunningham to capoeira, his work, thematically, remains rooted in home. "Almost everything I make refers to my life growing up in Pittsburgh," he says. , his first evening-length piece, examines the loss of two voices from his childhood: his father's, due to Alzheimer's and aphasia; and his community's, with the recent shutting down of WAMO 106.7, a much-loved Pittsburgh radio station. The results are both nostalgic and bracingly current, at times surging with the pulse of popular culture, at others zeroing in on an individual's rich inner life.

Music continues to be a stimulant for Abraham, who was a 2009 "25 to Watch," and his musicality intoxicating for audiences. He can ride the subtle undercurrents of any song—be it hip hop, indie, classical, or soul—bringing buried rhythms to the surface in swaths of luscious yet intricate movement. His commentary on hip hop culture produces some of the funniest, most astute moments in his work. In *The Radio Show*, he parodies rap lyrics like "shorty," "in da club," and "sippin' Patrón." In *Live!* he does a solo to the voice of an instructional video on how to do a hip roll. "Make it real smooth," the instructor says. Irony aside, Abraham couldn't look smoother.

As for the term "emerging," which can be an ego-bruiser for some, Abraham welcomes it. "I'm always striving to get to some new plateau," he says.

"If you've arrived, where are you gonna go next? I want everyone to know what we're doing. Until our message has reached every single person in the world, I'm still emerging." Current projects: June 5–6, Abraham presents a new work, currently titled *The Quiet Dance*, at The Joyce. *Live! The Realest MC*, commissioned by The Kitchen, premieres in December. "In some ways it's a Pinocchio story, about this character's quest to be a real boy," Abraham says. "He thinks being this hip hop MC will make people respect him."

**ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION**

Los Angeles Times

OCTOBER 20, 2011

KYLE ABRAHAM'S 'RADIO SHOW' AT REDCAT

by LEWIS SEGAL

Onstage at the REDCAT, New York-based choreographer Kyle Abraham is dancing a sublimely funky R&B solo with such perfect panache that it's a shock when he suddenly pauses, his head sadly nodding, one hand twitching, as if his soul train had become suddenly, irrevocably derailed.

The back of his shirt is slashed and torn, the recorded music chopped into a collage of fragments, and the sense of continuity -- social as well as personal -- fractured beyond repair. Welcome to "The Radio Show," Abraham's nonlinear 75-minute action-painting of contemporary America that opened Wednesday for a four-performance run.

Abraham's feelings about the closure of a Pittsburgh radio station and his father's descent into Alzheimer's shaped the piece, but its sense of displacement and loss transcends specifics. One moment Elyse Morris will exult in her high-voltage virtuosity and the next her control will shatter into violent spasms or a mournful stillness. Intimacy between Rena Butler and Chalvar Monteiro looks promising but hasn't a chance. And Hsiao-Jou Tang doesn't even struggle against the changes she sees in herself. Her meditative solo-in-silence is mostly

about resignation.

With few exceptions, the pervasive movement style is so bold and even fearless that you might not spot the intricacy of the choreography until the whole seven-member company dances in pluperfect unison. Indeed, matched moves make the second half of the piece an exciting company showpiece -- but often at the cost of the thematic rigor of Part 1.

There are a few intimations of Abraham's initial premise (his twitching hand just before the final fade-out, for example). But mostly you'll find a more literal approach to the selected songs along with an audience-participation segment conveying the forced jollity of a call-in radio show. It's all entertaining, one way or another, but not as remarkable as the deeply mournful vision brilliantly physicalized early on.

In addition to the dancers mentioned, the company includes Rachelle Rafeiledes and Maleek Mahkail Washington. Dan Scully designed a lighting plan that subjects the dancers to moments of painful isolation as well as glaring assault. Somber music by Amber Lee Parker supplements the pop tracks dominating the evening.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

The Boston Globe

August 14, 2010

A THEATRICAL SHOW
THAT'S BOISTEROUS
BUT TENDER

By JANINE PARKER

Choreographer Kyle Abraham, whose company is performing this week at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, apparently has a flurry of ideas and a burning impatience to pick which ones to explore. Even his company's name — Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion — points to a restlessness.

Fortunately, as the troupe's program of three dances indicates, his exploration is more than just navel-gazing. With a strong company of talented dancers, an insightful lighting designer, and a driving physicality to his movement, Abraham has great ingredients for good theater. Sensitivity, hurt, and disappointment are palpable threads in his work, but there's humor in Abraham's heart, too. In his 2006 solo "Inventing

Pookie Jenkins," Abraham tussles playfully with the themes of his inner life — as an artist and a gay man — and with the strife of the city. It begins meditatively, with Abraham sitting in a pool of light, his bare back to the audience. In silence, he reaches one arm up, bends his wrist, then caressingly passes it over his head and down, the other arm meeting it to make a softly rounded shape. This initial calm is disrupted by police sirens and gunshots. Wearing a long white skirt, Abraham skims around like an angel on wheels, or struts, a giant boombox on one shoulder, an even bigger 'tude in his stride. Though he wades out into the audience, shaking hands and asking " 'sup?" "how you doin'?" this is not a breaking of the fourth wall. He's still in character, wearing a shield of toughness over the tulle.

The world premiere "Op. 1" is beautifully strange, like a David Lynch film. Inspired by the wrestling photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, the piece features six dancers moving in and

out of a part of the stage that's been sectioned off, like a wrestling ring. Dan Scully's lighting design keeps them in a fuzzily haloed glow, and Ryoji Ikeda's score is full of eerily long strings. The exits and entrances are casual but ominous. Two women spar for several moments, their lack of passion unsettling. Later they take off their tops, cover their breasts with a forearm, and sit on two supine men, who roll them off to the side before executing a slow push-up. Even this hint of sex is distant, robotic.

"The Radio Show," choreographed earlier this year, is both boisterous and tender, with the dancers exploding into celebrations of movement or stunned into breathlessness, their heads hanging down, chests concave. Whereas "Op. 1" ends enigmatically — and perfectly, where it should — "The Radio Show" could stand some serious editing. Though it's fun, we don't need all of its sections to be bowled over by this knock-out of a dance.



ABRAH
AM IN
MOTI
ON

August 12, 2010
KYLE ABRAHAM/
ABRAHAM.IN.MOTION
@ JACOB'S PILLOW,
8/11/10

By Tresca Weinstein

There's an image from Kyle Abraham's 2006 solo "Inventing Pookie Jenkins" (which Abraham performs this week at Jacob's Pillow) that encapsulates what the dancer/choreographer is all about.

In "Pookie," Abraham is bare-chested, carrying a giant ghetto blaster and wearing a poufy, floor-length white skirt—a visual that sends the clear message that he's not willing to restrict himself to any one style, persona or attitude. Abraham can be tough-strutting across the stage with his boom box—and he can be vulnerable, keeping his face hidden from the audience so we see only his back rising from a drift of white. He can fly across the stage, limbs appearing to move a dozen ways at once, or he can focus in on the subtle undulation of an wrist or a hand. And, as illustrated by the program his company, Abraham.In.Motion, presents this week at the Pillow, he can compose distinctive, idiosyncratic movement that merges a handful of forms—and seamlessly set it to a score that ranges from

J.S. Bach to Al Green to Lady Gaga.

The two ensemble works on the program present two divergent facets of Abraham's choreography. "Op. 1," which the company premiered Wednesday, is inspired in part by Eadweard Muybridge's 1955 book "The Human Figure in Motion," which includes some five thousand photographs of models as they move through each step of an everyday action, such as walking or hopping. The movement in "Op. 1" feels similarly deconstructed, with phrases repeated multiple times by different dancers, performed precisely and deliberately and sometimes slowly enough to recall Japanese Butoh dance. It asks us to consider anew such actions as the ball joint of a shoulder rotating within its socket, an elbow bending at a right angle to support a head, a woman climbing up a man's back to sit on his shoulders. A transparent scrim hung at the front of the stage serves as a screen on which images are projected, primarily a grid of white lines that underscores the almost mathematical progression of the work. Music by Ryoji Ikeda, rising and falling without resolution, emphasizes the sense of infinitely unfolding motion. Only once do the dancers break out of the impersonal exploration, when Rachelle Rafailedes and Maureen

Wright engage in a closely knit wrestling match while the others move impassively around them.

"The Radio Show," which premiered earlier this year, is the very opposite of impersonal. An homage to Abraham's childhood in Pittsburgh, to his father, who suffers from Alzheimer's, and to Pittsburgh's now-defunct community radio station, 106.7 FM (WAMO)/AM 860, it's rife with personality. Abraham's score, which weaves together some four dozen songs and snippets of songs with audience participation and talk-show chatter, complements a series of diverse movement sections, including a solo set to Aretha Franklin's "Mary, Don't You Weep" for Amber Lee Parker, playing Abraham's mother while he portrays his father, bent and shaking.

Parker, a petite, sexy powerhouse, is also terrific in a fluid trio with Wright and Rafailedes, set to Beyoncé's "That's How You Like It." Rafailedes and the splendid Raymond Pinto meet and then reunite in two tender duets, perhaps embodying Abraham's parents in years gone by. The work is long (a bit of judicious editing would not be out of place), but it absorbs us completely in its story and in the community and family it preserves.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

CULTUREBOT

March 2, 2010

KYLE ABRAHAM AT
DANSPACE PROJECT
by MDONOHUE

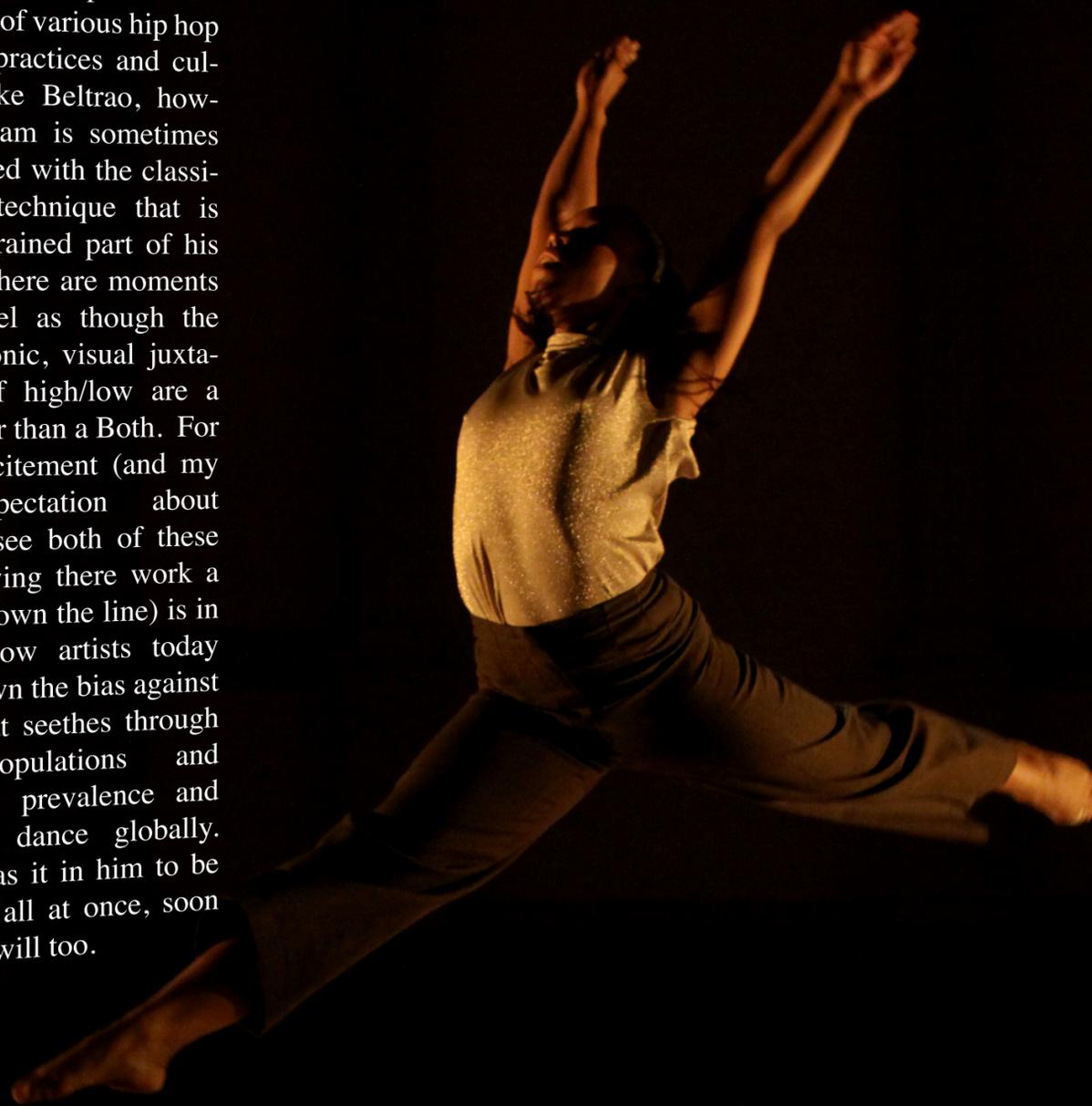
Kyle Abraham is working a successful mix of dazzle and poignancy to great effect. Last weekend, he premiered "The Radio Show" to packed houses at Danspace Project. He's been on my watch list since seeing his solo and group works, "Brick" and "The Dripping Kind" at Dance Theater Workshop two years ago. Last summer, I joined his little group during an audience break-out session in the midst of David Dorfman's "Disavowal," also presented by Danspace Project. Audience members were supposed to sit with the cast member/character we most identified with. He had served as a powerful antagonist, challenging white guilt and entitlement. I don't see myself as "Angry Black Man," but those of us who are at the margins of the Marked half of the spectrum end up there some of the time. Up close and personal, he was

immediately warm and receiving. A ferocious out package wrapped around a sweet center. I was already a fan, I became an admirer.

A solo he showed during Camille A. Brown's season at Joyce Soho revealed his continued explorations in smashing formal and popular dance forms together. As then, he continues to use music and sound in "The Radio Show" as obvious sign posts for the converging and sometimes oppositional aesthetic forces at work, setting Beyonce next to pulsing static in the same way he throws a pirouette next to a hair toss or shoulder roll. His own ability to rapidly shift between vernacular and classical dance forms is impressive and part of the great allure of his work, but he's showing more skill at highlighting the outstanding abilities of his virtuosic dancers and letting them rip across some cultural borders.

"The Radio Show" is a memorial of sorts, as well, both to a former hometown radio station, AM860/FM 106.7 in Pittsburgh and to the father he is losing to Alzheimer's. There is potent grief in the shaking crumple

that follows an explosive series of bound and electric chest pops and arm swings. But, there is also the excitement at watching an artist pull both the kinesthetic and emotional meanings out of popularized movement and back into the highly personal realm it came from. Like Bruno Beltrao, Abraham captures the spirit inside of various hip hop movement practices and culture. Unlike Beltrao, however, Abraham is sometimes too enamored with the classical dance technique that is also an ingrained part of his heritage. There are moments where I feel as though the physical, sonic, visual juxtapositions of high/low are a battle, rather than a Both. For me, the excitement (and my grand expectation about where I'll see both of these artists showing their work a few years down the line) is in watching how artists today can tear down the bias against hip hop that seethes through certain populations and ignores its prevalence and impact on dance globally. Abraham has it in him to be everything, all at once, soon enough his will too.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

The New York Times

February 26, 2010

DANCE REVIEW
SENDING SIGNALS WITH
SONGS, STRUTS AND
STATIC

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO

Storms like the miserable, windy mess that hit New York on Thursday make it easy to cancel evening plans. Is it really worth getting cold and wet to see another show?

If it's "The Radio Show,"

yes. Kyle Abraham's new work, created in collaboration with his company, Abraham. In.Motion, opened Thursday at Danspace Project, and soggy shoes seemed a small price to pay for admission to this layered, carefully structured dance.

The roughly 90-minute evening was set up like a diptych, with "AM 860" and "106.7 FM" separated by an intermission. (A preshow set the mood as viewers filtered in.) The titles refer to sister stations in Pittsburgh, where Mr. Abraham grew up, and the score features snippets of call-in radio, along with numerous popular songs, passages of static and electronic pulses and original music by Amber Lee Parker. These audio elements hint at broader conversations on a host of topics in social politics, including relationships, sexuality and race. Mr. Abraham's voluptuous yet formalist movement choices do the same, building on themes within "Brick," the powerful solo he performed two years ago at Dance Theater Workshop.

Hyper-masculine or sexualized feminine gestures and poses

bled into lunging, buckling skeins of choreography that brought to mind a rich spectrum of contemporary dance, from Ronald K. Brown to Trisha Brown. Sometimes these phrases stuttered, then ground to a halt, the dancers' bodies shaking or freezing as if stymied by too many choices: what mask to wear today?

The cast of seven, Mr. Abraham included, was as fierce as the choreography. Jeremy Nedd, Rachele Rafeiledes and Mr. Abraham were particularly impressive, balancing fluidity with finely calibrated precision. It isn't easy to look equally convincing whether strutting and preening or rocketing from relevé balances to the floor and back up again on the knuckles of your toes.

Sarah Cabbage's handsome, sexy costumes, featuring high-waisted, wide-legged trousers and shirts with cutaway backs, captured Mr. Abraham's mix of austerity and sensuality. So did Dan Scully's lighting, which employed a back row of lights close to the floor to spike the quieter overall design with a showbiz atmosphere.

Mr. Abraham is still young;

"The Radio Show" is his company's first full-evening work, and it could do with more careful editing in places, and fewer belaboring of points in others. But his continuing investigation into contemporary culture is to be applauded, and encouraged. It's smart and self-aware, and luscious too: the complete package.

ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

February 1, 2010

DANCE REVIEW | KYLE ABRAHAM POWERS UP SOUND MOVES IN HIS 'RADIO SHOW'

By JANE VRANISH

Kyle Abraham combines the story of his father with the demise of WAMO in "The Radio Show."

Kyle Abraham seemed to be encased in a personal reverie as the audience filtered into the Kelly-Strayhorn Saturday night. The Shirelles' voices wafted through the theater with "Momma said there'd be days like this ..."

He was quietly gliding to the familiar lyrics with the poetic street-stTyle moves that he covets, using the slo-mo hip-hop arms above and a splayed fourth position and punctuating stag leap below. Suddenly the motion was interrupted as his intense focus, almost butoh-like, dropped like a descending curtain. Mr. Abraham began to go slack.

It interrupted his private dance, but in a good way. With this almost casual prelude, Mr. Abraham firmly established the thematic content for the evening: a dual tribute to his father, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and now is virtually unable to speak, and the 2009 demise of WAMO, Pittsburgh's iconic urban radio station, where people called in to sing, to

request and just to talk.

So Mr. Abraham already had one foot in "The Radio Show" as the auditorium lights went down and the stage lights, some on the floor at the back, began to heighten his sense of purpose. This would be a biographical evening in a way, not literally but impressionistic, like memories that come and go and often try to overlap.

You heard the scratching, like a radio station changing, as Mr. Abraham began to flourish, widening the arc of his movement. Then there was the sound of a phone being dialed, and Aretha Franklin began to layer the lyrics in "Mary Don't You Weep."

Mr. Abraham took a similar tack as a trio of women (Amber Parker, Samantha Farrow and Rachelle Ra-failedes) gradually moved onto the stage -- posturing, balancing on the balls of their feet and interpreting Mr. Abraham's vocabulary with their own feminine wiles.

In all Mr. Abraham brought six dancers, including Maureen Damaso and a pair of men, Raja Kelly and Jeremy Nedd. The movement traveled among them in various unison configurations, conveying a sense of the isolation in contemporary society. Mr. Abraham occasionally played on that idea by also separating one dancer from the pack.

When the dancers touched, perhaps only a shoulder or a knee, it gave off a tender emotional charge. But he could also amp it up with a choke-

hold or a double body ripple that ended in a soft lift during the rare intimacy of a duet.

Mr. Abraham packed a lot of life-like suggestions in his work, which could be sweetly poignant, full of attitude or comic (the "make it or break it" segment with faux DJ and singer was quintessentially WAMO). "The Radio Show," so life-like, so compelling in the seesaw of human emotion, demonstrated how Mr. Abraham is honing his craft.

With this production, he finally showed he is capable of translating the singular vision of his solo work onto multiple bodies without diluting it. Where before he created sentences, he now creates paragraphs that lead to a whole story, for all the seemingly disparate human elements revolved around his vision like planets circling the sun. It was that bright and intelligent.

Mr. Abraham could have been considered an emerging artist in the past. But he has obviously taken his dance to the next level, and it is nothing less than impressive.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

December 03, 2008

Kyle Abraham, Layard Thompson, and the Limón Company Explore Their Histories

By Deborah Jowitt

I first saw Kyle Abraham's work when he was getting his MFA at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He's come great distances since then, finding his voice as a performer-choreographer and investigating his identity as a gay African-American male. A solo, *Dream Lockdown*, that he performed on one of DanceNOW's October programs, confirmed his talents. In that, alternately fluid and jerky, he seemed to be in a simultaneous process of becoming and falling apart. In his new solo, *Brick*, at DTW, he channels stylistic aspects of two sources: Kara Walker's cut-out-silhouette scenes and work by the 17th-century Japanese artist Hishikawa Moronobu. At first, back to us, wearing a very bouffant Afro wig and a hoodie over full black pants, he strikes positions against a white paneled backdrop that

allude to Walker's images of violence against African Americans; an associate traces the outline of this living silhouette (later shapes of white light fill those outlines). When Abraham sheds the wig (more of them rise on wires as décor), he reveals black body paint and a gleaming corselet. Against a background of twin slides showing what I took to be a Japanese river town in the rain, his wonderfully expressive body sometimes suggests Moronobu's influence in its settled clarity, its slow gestures, and the way his hands flick the space around him. Yet his rippling arms, hips, and shoulders also reach back to Africa and forward to hip-hop. At one point, when rap breaks out in the collage score, his undulations toughen until he's punching the air. Abraham's *The Dripping Kind* began as an installation, and it retains a sculptural calm—simple but vibrant in space. Dancers enter one by one in silence at a leisurely pace and assume a position in profile—standing on tiptoe, one foot forward, body curved over, arms hanging. Each of them (Jenn Freeman, Chelamar Bernard, Maureen Damaso, Nicole Mannarino, Sumaya Jackson, Evan

Copeland, Meghan Merrill) is bent to a different degree, as if Abraham wanted to depict the stages of melting. In various combinations, they stagger forward, getting closer and closer to the ground, roll one way and then the other, rise and retreat to their poses. They do this for quite a while, and it's always interesting. Another repeated and varied action reinforces the strangely poignant tone. Mannarino braces herself in a pushup position, and the others take turns entering and crawling under the bridge of her body; when her visitor lies supine, she lowers herself onto him or her and rests there for a short while. Then she pushes up again, and the person leaves. Sometimes she puts these guests' arms around her, or they embrace her. Merrill, her last "lover," stays the longest, and after some gentle, but strong passages of movement by the group, Merrill places Mannarino in the same half-melting embrace of empty air that Mannarino earlier molded her into, then walks away, leaving her friend alone on the darkening stage. The music's by Arvo Pärt, Thomas Brinkmann, and Gabriela Montero, and Abby Geartner joins the dance at some point.



ABRAHAM IN MOTION



InfiniteBody

infinitebody.blogspot.com

Sunday, December 7, 2008
DTW: PAPER OR PLASTIC?

By Eva Yaa Asantewaa

On Saturday night, the shared program of Kyle Abraham (of Abraham.In.Motion) and Layard Thompson drew one of the coolest audiences I've seen at Dance Theater Workshop--or anywhere--in a long time. If I could put in an order for more of the same, all around New York's dance scene, I would. But, then again, how diverse did this audience turn out to be when some of Abraham's followers left in the break before Thompson's half of the show? (Oh, well...) In any case, both of these artists made strong impressions over the course of an evening that, under normal circumstances, would have felt--and, indeed, would have been--way, way, way too long. Somehow, both of these guys pulled it off. How? Abraham. Folks should rush to sign up to dance for him. I certainly would. With an assist from costumer Sarah Cabbage and lighting/projection designer Dan Scully, Abraham creates environments--no, havens-- for the human body that show it off to startling effect. Witness his solo Brick, its multiple, moody aesthetic layers--minstrel-like stereo-

types writ monumental, floating Afro wigs, black skin coated in jet-black grease paint, moody Japanese landscapes, crime-scene outline graffiti, a collaged soundscape of irresistible hip hop rhythms with highly-resistible hip hop lyrics--and the way it stuns you and suspends you in a light trance poised between avoidance and indulgence. A solo, sinuous and jarring, all of it coming at you, illogically, in waves of elegance.

A haunted performance by a young yet confident performer, one who shows himself, in *The Dripping Kind*, his ensemble piece, to have a keen eye, serious discipline and incomprehensible originality. Whenever Abraham sets anything before you, be sure to keep track of stuff going on in the margins. He will color outside the box. I suspect we will have to reckon with this rising artist in coming years.

Thompson. The boundary-less Id that crashed the party. Propelling himself down DTW's stairs in a noisy, ruffly dress constructed from a gathering of used paper coffee cups.

Thompson flopping and levitating. Chanting and burping. Shedding his shell-like dress and inner cocoon like layers of plastic baggage. Cup...puC.....K.....Ohhhh, Beauty, full, vessel: Holy ritual. Wholly, a tantrum. Thompson is

a child unsupervised, only sporadically self-conscious. Or, perhaps, Thompson is Mother Earth Herself, keening and flailing like a oil-soaked cormorant, wacked out and desperate to get out from under. Borderline. Some people tittered, but it's really painful (and potentially transformative) to watch with an open heart.

Like Abraham, Thompson gathers collaborators who go full-tilt with him--in this case, lighting designer Chloë Z Brown and costumer Machine P.H.D. (Pixie Harlot Dazzle). The world they conjure--which is to say, our world of consumption, excess and heedless destruction--is completely mirrored in Thompson's risk-taking performance. Risky to body and damn challenging to an audience who, among other things, must witness the performer turning a spreading puddle of urine into a prop. Tempting to say that Thompson doesn't know when to stop, that Cup ranneth over numerous times and could have--should have--ended at any point along the way. But the man gave his all, and then some, and it all fit his intention. I'd call that a success.

**ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION**

The New York Times

December 5, 2008

DANCE REVIEW | KYLE ABRAHAM AND LAYARD THOMPSON
SCRUTINIZE THE SHIELD,
BEWARE THE MIRROR

By CLAUDIA LA ROCCO

One of the body's more captivating mysteries is its ability to be simultaneously abstract and weighed down with baggage, or to move so quickly between those modes that the watcher never catches the transition.

Kyle Abraham and Layard Thompson, who performed new solos at Dance Theater Workshop on Wednesday, are beautiful dancers, and crafty ones. They wield themselves like shields, then mirrors, so that the viewer's gaze is first deflected, then cruelly caught. In "Brick," a slippery negotiation of black male identity and sexuality, Mr. Abraham married gesticulating hip-hop bravado to a silky movement language somewhere between Butoh and voguing. His skin was covered in thick black

paint; as he moved across a patchwork of white floor mats (artfully lit by Dan Scully), he left a sooty trail.

His form was also captured in crude marker outlines when he posed against a white backdrop. Kara Walker's brutal cutouts came to mind, as did chalk drawings of crime victims. He shed a large Afro, which was later hoisted into the air with four others. Mr. Abraham too was ensnared, his arm wrenched through a loop in a rope he had just climbed.

"You know what makes me much stronger than you?" go the lyrics of the Lil' Kim track he used. "I can take pain much longer than you." Like that song, Mr. Abraham offered a swagger that paradoxically denied and laid bare a core of throbbing hurt.

Mr. Thompson laid it all bare in "Cup ... puC K Ohhhh, Beauty, full, vessel:," which is heavily indebted — perhaps too much so — to the choreographer Deborah Hay's idiosyncratic style. Growling, hiccuping and babbling, Mr. Thompson shed a dress of paper cups (done in collaboration with Machine Dazzle; Chloë Z. Brown's lighting

also deserves a nod), a cocoon of plastic bags and, finally, his briefs — though not before giving himself the mother of all wedgies.

Fey and bewitching, Mr. Thompson shifted disconcertingly between a self-conscious overtly sexual presentation and an abject, ferocious sort of wildness that had him picking at his body and yowling.

He darted between creaturely movement and blowsy come-ons. He burrowed into an even more extravagant paper-cup cape and came up for air wearing a black, boxy mask and beyond-fabulous headdress of plastic bottles.

He urinated. He thoroughly tested the viewer's patience — but, in the end, he held it.

Mr. Abraham's "Dripping Kind," a handsome evocation of isolation and restless relationships for eight dancers, completed the program. Though further editing mightn't be amiss, the work's tense, lunging movement lingered in the mind's eye. Here were bodies rendered far more formally, yet still inseparable from their internal earthquakes of emotion and need.



ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION

DECEMBER 6, 2007

Rising dancer and choreographer Kyle Abraham premieres his first evening-length work in his hometown

BY BILL O'DRISCOLL

Kyle Abraham has departed Pittsburgh many times -- but he's never really left.

The dancer and choreographer is a graduate of Pittsburgh's performing-arts high school who last year completed graduate dance studies at New York University; his Abraham.in.Motion company is based in Brooklyn. But overseas performance credits and a growing NYC profile notwithstanding, Abraham, 30, keeps addresses in both towns and works frequently in Pittsburgh. His hometown is also where he's premiering *Fading Into Something Tangible*, his and the company's first evening length work, Dec. 6-8 at the New Hazlett Theater.

Another solo is "Awaiting Change," commissioned by The Andy Warhol Museum to accompany *Without Sanctuary*,

its 2001 lynching exhibit. With video by Staycee Pearl and sound by Herman "Soy Sos" Pearl, both of Pittsburgh, Abraham updates the potent work to reference the Jena 6 case and other additions to America's inventory of racial strife.

"Awaiting Change," in fact, closed the show in Abraham and company's roof-raising Oct. 17 performance at the New Hazlett during the August Wilson Center's First Voice black arts festival. That performance also included a rousing, partly improvised Abraham solo, titled "10.17.07," and a sensual duet in which Cecily Campbell and Jenn Freeman danced (to "My Funny Valentine") while engaged in a deep and lengthy liplock -- during which at least a couple of older patrons walked out.

That duet is on the Dec. 6-8 program, along with the premiere of "Number 6," a work for six dancers -- inspired by the Pollock painting and set to the minimalist music of Steve Reich -- that was excerpted here Oct. 17.

Abraham's style -- blending Merce Cunningham abstraction, hip-hop rhythms and ballet, for starters -- is eclectic. Besides CAPA, his

early training included the Civic Light Opera Academy. In the early 2000s, after undergraduate studies at SUNY Purchase, he choreographed here for Attack Theater, Dance Alloy and Xpressions Contemporary Dance, among others, and in New York performed with troupes including the renowned Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company. In 2004, Abraham premiered two works at London's Arts Exchange. In the past couple of months alone, he's danced "Inventing Pookie" at New York's big annual Fall For Dance festival, and a Dec. 1 show at the prestigious Dance Theater Workshop.

Admirers include iconic dancer, postmodernist choreographer and critic Gus Solomons Jr., who has praised Abraham's "very strong voice" and "very rich" movement.

Abraham's work hasn't impressed everyone. Critiquing *Fall for Dance* in *The New York Times*, Alastair Macaulay dismissed "Pookie" as "a watch-me display of upper-body archness."

But longtime observers see development. Gwen Hunter Ritchie, who befriended Abraham several years ago, when both were with Dance

Alloy, commissioned Abraham to choreograph for LABCO Dance after she became that Pittsburgh troupe's artistic director. Ritchie admired Abraham's solo choreography, but found that his "idiosyncratic" movement style -- "very sharp, very distinct" -- didn't come across when he set other dancers. She felt differently after seeing the Oct. 17 *First Voice* show. "I just thought, 'Wow, he has really grown as a choreographer,'" says Ritchie. "He's been able to kind of translate his vocabulary onto a different set of dancers nicely. 'His dancers are gorgeous,'" Ritchie adds. "I think he's really found a group of dancers that can pull off his movement, and add their own individual style."



**ABRAHAM
IN
MOTION**

OUT

THE NEW NEW YORK

After earning his master's degree at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts in the '90s, Pittsburgh-born choreographer Kyle Abraham planted roots in the city that inspires his work. Since then, Abraham, 31, has performed with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company and the Mimi Garrard Dance Theatre, and as a choreographer has founded his own ensemble, Abraham.In.Motion.

Alternately propulsive and staccato, fluid and gentle, his solo performances often explore notions of masculinity in an urban environment, using car alarms, gunshots, and hip-hop as his soundtrack (see the piece *Inventing Pookie Jenkins*). The shows featuring the company are no less energetic but often subtler, with a quieter narrative involving longer and slower movements. Recently, Abraham was approached about choreographing a movement-based play centered around the legendary New York club Paradise Garage. "All of these projects are very collaborative, with scenic elements and new approaches to lighting design," he says. "I think there's something really powerful in balancing the elaborate with all things scaled down."



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25 TO WATCH

KYLE ABRAHAM
by STEVE SUCATO

Whether choreographing a duet in which two female dancers are lip-locked in a two-and-a-half-minute kiss or a stirring solo about racism, dancer/ choreographer Kyle Abraham uses controversy as his muse. "I try to make work relevant to my experiences as a college-educated black gay man," says Abraham. "My works tend to deal with the connotations and assumptions of all those labels."

The 31-year-old Pittsburgh native, now living in Brooklyn, dances with David Dorfman in addition to making waves with his own dance company Abraham. In.Movtiovn. As a performer, he is equal parts power and grace layered on a sinewy frame. His choreographic style is an amalgam of hip hop and modern dance. In 2009, audiences can see him with David Dorfman Dance as well as with his own company beginning this month as part of "Past/Forward: A Tisch Dance Alumni Celebration," Jan. 31, at NYU's Skirball Center.



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