

Monday, February 2, 2009

OU alumnus, guest lecturer to put passion for choreography on stage

By **Dave Groves**, news editor

After becoming the first African-American male to graduate with a bachelor's degree in dance from Oakland University, Rodney A. Brown left campus to broaden his education and embark on a career in the performing arts.

He found considerable success – earning a master's degree in fine arts from the University of Michigan, performing with numerous dance companies and choreographers throughout the U.S. and later serving as resident choreographer for the Dayton Contemporary Dance Second Company. Still, he never completely severed ties with Oakland.

In fact, Brown has returned to OU's Department of Music, Theatre and Dance this year to explore his creativity in new ways. An artist in residence and guest lecturer, he will share some of his work when the Brown Dance Project teams with OU Dance Program Director Gregory Patterson and the Patterson Rhythm Pace Dance Company for a performance on Saturday, Feb. 7.

"We get a chance to premier things created just for this concert," Brown explained. "It's work just brought out of the closet, so to speak."

The performer, choreographer, educator and political activist said the evening will be host to a series of pieces that touch on widely varying concepts rather than conform to a unifying theme. One thing the audience will notice in all the work, however, is a focus on expression through a multiplicity of perspectives.

"Knowing this campus as I do, I see that diversity is a big issue here," Brown explained. "This concert on Saturday will be a huge testament to that. There is just a huge array of diversity in the people you'll see."

In much of the dance he creates, Brown aims to raise social consciousness, inspire political action and advance the cause of justice. Among other issues, he has a strong commitment to HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

Directed by these objectives, he said his work does not even remotely evoke the faeries, dragons and other specters of fantasy that some have come to associate with theatrical dance.

"I've been tagged with that 'dark choreographer' label," Brown said. "I'm dealing with really personal issues. I'm dealing with issues that interest me and move me in some way."

It's clear his work is moving others as well – particularly students Brown has been working with as part of a full teaching load. Some of these students will join him in performing the pieces he has created.

"They're interested, they're hungry, and that's the way it has to be," Brown said. "For me, it has to be a kitten-to-milk atmosphere."

The Brown Dance Project teams and the Patterson Rhythm Pace Dance Company will perform at 8 p.m. on Saturday in Varner Recital Hall on the OU campus. For more information, visit www.browndanceproject.org/engagements.html.



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SUMMARY

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