

## Trisha Brown Dance Company: a return to pure dance at its best

Par Graham Watts, 17 mars 2025

More and more, these days, contemporary dance has become enmeshed in a kaleidoscope of visual effects, including projections, animations, monumental sets and whacky lighting designs, and so it is refreshing to have a programme that is devoted to pure movement, embellished only by simple but effective lighting, some ambient sounds and simple costuming.



Trisha Brown Dance Company in Noé Soulier's *In the Fall*  
© Joyce Baranova

Trisha Brown was a cutting-edge American choreographer who integrated visual and performance art with dance. Deconstructing the process and expanding the performance envelope was always at the heart of her work, whether having a marching band performing the music outside the theatre (*Foray Forêt*, 1990) or the dancers still performing in the wings, unseen by the audience (*Glacial Decoy*, her first work for the proscenium stage in 1979).

Brown died in 2017 but her company – currently eight dancers – continues under the leadership of longtime Brown performer, Carolyn Lucas, who out of respect to the company's founder is described as "Associate Artistic Director" (and who, by the way, performed in the premiere of *Working Title* in 1985). It respects and revives her repertoire and, in the eight years since Brown's death (the anniversary of which falls on 18 March) has commissioned just two new works, the second of which, Noé Soulier's *In the Fall* was included in this programme, alongside Brown's own *Working Title*, which was revived in a new production alongside *In the Fall*, in 2023. Brown had a special affinity with France, where her work is especially revered and so the choice of a French choreographer to help continue her phenomenal legacy is apt.



Trisha Brown Dance Company in Noé Soulier's *In the Fall*  
© Joyce Baranova

Since I was unfamiliar with both works, the first confusion was which piece was which, since both were performed by the same eight dancers. The programme and pre-event information indicated that *Working Title* preceded the new work, but their order of performance was reversed so that the modern homage came first. It's an important point since Soulier's recent work is so much in the style of Brown's early proscenium works that I could have been easily persuaded that it was by Brown herself.

*In the Fall* starts with an experimentation in pushing the extremity of a dancer's precarious balance until the weight transference creates a controlled fall. The opening, to Florian Hecker's sounds of a windblown natural environment, was a succession of these balances, on one leg, the other outstretched limbs pushed forward and back until the tipping point has been reached. One dancer exited the stage, and another appeared in a succession of mix-and-match duets of weight and balance. The group gradually increased with the costuming of the octet split into four pairs of primary block colours: when all eight were onstage the effect, against the bare floor and backdrop, was naturally vivid.



Trisha Brown Dance Company in Brown's *Working Title*  
© Joyce Baranova

Although Soulier's title suggests otherwise his work is not all in the fall, since after that opening it shifts from the individual sphere to the ensemble in ever-changing configurations of individual and synchronised movement.

*Working Title* is exactly what it says on the tin. Although the original is now 40 years old, it has undergone significant revisions for this new production, not least in the fact that the 1985 version included aerial work and that the original costumes have been replaced by new outfits by Elizabeth Cannon that are sympathetic to those original, loose-fitting, floating tunics and trousers.

Where *In the Fall* started in contemplative mood, *Working Title* immediately starts with all the dancers fluidly moving from the right-side wings onto the stage in turning and walking mode. Brown has described her primary influence as a childhood walk through a forest, being careful where to tread and once this image comes to mind, it makes sense of the controlled and sometimes cautious movement. The music is Peter Zummo's *Six Songs*, which was the basis for Brown's *Lateral Pass* (also 1985) and is heavily influenced by the trombone, Zummo's principal instrument.

The eight dancers of the TBDC are an extraordinary mix of outstanding artists and all deserve praise but a special mention is due to Catherine Kirk. She graced this same stage only a few weeks ago as a guest with A.I.M. by Kyle Abraham (her home for several years before moving to TBDC, two years ago) in *An Untitled Love*, my favourite piece in The Rose Prize. The juxtaposition of the comedic, vocal text and balletic movement of that work and this more austere Brownian style shows the immense versatility of this exceptional artist.

This main stage work opened the Van Cleef and Arpels *Dance Reflections Festival*, returning to London for the second time, which will feature some 15 works over the next month or so. At a time when funding for the arts is under serious threat, we must compliment the company on its massive commitment to dance. We are all much the better for it in these uncertain times.

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