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# Review: Trisha Brown Company Is Back, in Witty, Delicate Glory

TRISHA BROWN DANCE COMPANY

- NYT Critic's Pick  
**By BRIAN SEIBERT**  
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Clockwise from background left, Kyle Marshall, Amanda Kmett'Pendry (top), Jacob Storer and Cecily Campbell in "L'Amour au Théâtre," at the Joyce Theater. Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

For a troupe that recently went on what was sometimes billed as a farewell tour, or at least as the end of something, the [Trisha Brown Dance Company](#) does not look as if it were going gently into any good night. The program that the group presented at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday is exactly

the kind that it [was supposed to be phasing out](#): a repertory sampler in a proscenium theater. Would that all broken promises were so wonderful.

Any capriciousness is excused by circumstance. With [the death of Brown, its founder](#), in March, the company inevitably entered a period of uncertainty. Yet things have been uncertain for a while — since Brown retired in 2013, and even before, when indications of the vascular dementia that forced her retirement first appeared. Carolyn Lucas and Diane Madden, the veteran dancers who have led the troupe since then, have advanced with an understandable caution that has caused some confusion. But for anyone who cares about the continuance of Brown’s oeuvre, one of the greatest in American dance, Tuesday’s performance by a crop of mostly new dancers was clearly encouraging.



From left, Oluwadamilare Ayorinde, Marc Crousillat (center,) Amanda Kmett’Pendry and Leah Ives in “Geometry of Quiet.” CreditAndrea Mohin/The New York Times

It may sound paradoxical, but it’s a mark of health that the three works on this program aren’t masterpieces. They all come from the first decade of this century — late in Brown’s ever-questing five-decade career — and though they all possess the signature Brownian virtues of liquidity, invention, wit and delicate beauty, they aren’t major artistic breakthroughs. That’s not a problem. The minor works of a major artist also deserve extended life.

One way of describing this selection is as a display of musical versatility. The program opens with Baroque opera and ends with jazz. But it's the piece with the sparsest score that is the most spellbinding.

For "Geometry of Quiet" (2002), the flutist Sato Moughalian plays the music of Salvatore Sciarrino: a barely there composition of breathing and coughing that eventually breaks into bird song. The dancers slowly form shape after shape. Often in pairs, they look like shorebirds atilt or modernist sculpture. Certain configurations return with an extra body, elaborations that don't disturb the balance, revelations of pieces we didn't know were missing.



Members of the company in "Groove and Countermove." CreditAndrea Mohin/The New York Times

The other scores are denser, but generally, the less that's going on in the music, the more interesting and varied Brown's choreography is. "L'Amour au Théâtre" (2009), set to excerpts from Rameau's "Hippolyte et Aricie," matches the aristocratic decorum of the music with its own democratic cooperation, the dancers calmly inverting one another, assembling cantilevered tableaux. Images from the libretto, like horses for chase music, appear wittily, but nothing approaching tragedy or conflict ever intrudes.

By the end of “Groove and Countermove” (2000), Brown’s choreography, with its postmodern sense of stage space and many independent yet harmonizing elements, manages to complement Dave Douglas’s jazz score without any jazz vocabulary. But there isn’t really much groove to the music or the dance, and it was in this piece that some of the newer performers showed a small stiffness or a slight hesitancy that can be glaring within Brown’s aesthetic of frictionless flow.

That’s not a major problem, either. Only one of these dancers has worked with Brown directly. That so much of her slippery, evanescent style and playful intelligence have been transmitted is the cheering sign at this juncture. And if the artistic qualities that Brown’s art can seem to lack — high drama, tension, darkness, pain — are especially absent in these works, the absence feels less troubling in these troubled times. Quiet geometry is an oasis.