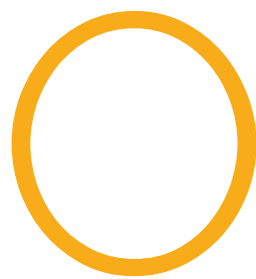


Performance shows two dancers “Same but Different”



BY **ELSIE**
LYNN PARINI

Over the past year, we've seen artists — time and again — pivoting to find new and different ways to continue communicating through art. Yes, it's awesome, but it isn't revolutionary.

“Artists are, and have been, the model for entrepreneurship and innovation,” said Middlebury College Associate Professor

of Dance Christal Brown, who is prepping to launch a new dance performance with Lida Winfield (also an Associate Professor of Dance at Middlebury) this weekend.

The duo will present “Same But Different” as a pre-taped show, premiering Jan. 30 and running through Feb. 6 through the Flynn’s online theater.

“‘Same but Different’ is a collaboration between Christal and Lida, exploring their similarities and differences in a cultural commentary on race, age and gender,” wrote Winfield in

an e-newsletter to her followers. “Lida grew up in the North, Christal grew up in the South, both of them grew up inhabiting small towns. Lida is white, Christal is black. As children, Christal was considered a genius and Lida was labeled dumb. At this point in their lives, Lida and Christal have both lived the rigors of being artists, professors, educators and survivors of life.”

While “Same But Different” is particularly on-point right now — as we grapple with the pandemic, injustice and disunity in our country — Brown clarified that this piece was not made in response to the pandemic or current conditions of the world. Brown and Winfield have been working on this project since 2016.

“About four years ago Christal and I were teaching at the Bates Young Dancers Festival,” Winfield’s newsletter explained. “Although we had mingled in many professional circles; we didn’t know each other very well. After watching Christal interact with the students and our colleagues I felt admiration and a kinship towards her. I began to notice how alike we were. Christal approached me, and in a casual and visionary way said; ‘We should make a piece called ‘Same But Different’ that highlights our similarities but how because of what we look like the world may never connect the dots.’”

In January 2020, Brown and Winfield began working in earnest on the dance. COVID — which took the life of Winfield’s father — moved them out of the studio and into Brown’s garage where they continued to work.

“Our friendship, respect for one another, perseverance and artistry have been inspiring,” Winfield said.

“You can’t make a piece like this without knowing someone,” echoed Brown.

You also can’t make a piece like this without funds. Where did the money come from? Well, Brown and Winfield came up with a way that individual supporters could fund the project: the “Process Pass.” This pass gave supporters short video clips and audio files monthly that documented the process of making this performance.

“It allowed us to circumvent the traditional grant process,” Brown explained. “People can say, here’s \$100 and I want to be a part of this; it gives people a stakeholder role.”

The funds collected were used in part to pay a videographer to put together footage that Brown and Winfield could send to their supporters monthly. Beyond the video clips, Brown and Winfield also collaborated with composers Philippe Bronchtein and Farai Malianga, photographer Sam Kann, assistant camera operator Matteo Moretti, dramaturg Michole Biancosino, lighting designer Jennifer Ponder and costume designer Carol Wood.

The performance Brown and Winfield are presenting digitally has some serious production value.

“It’s a dance that’s filmed for media engagement,” Brown said. “It’s not just one wide-angled documentary shot like you’re sitting in the audience; you’ll get intimate views throughout the piece.”

This is not a sit-at-home-with-your-sweatpants-on kind of premiere. Nope. Brown and Winfield are elevating digital dance.

“Would you go to the theater in the pajamas? No,” said Brown, who together with Winfield will be hosting a champagne toast and live Q&A after the premiere on Jan. 30. “It’s about bringing the quality of the experience.”

Tickets are \$20, and are available at flynnvt.org. Supporters are welcome to purchase the process pass (\$100) at any point to see how “Same But Different” was created.



Christal Brown, left, and Lida Winfield, both professors of dance at Middlebury College, have collaborated to create “Same But Different,” which will premiere online on this Saturday, Jan. 30, at 7 p.m. Tickets are available at flynnvt.org.

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