



PRESENTS **DAVID ROUSSÈVE/
REALITY**

Doris Duke Theatre

July 3-7, 2019

CHOREOGRAPHER/DIRECTOR/WRITER* David Roussève
MUSICAL SCORE Billy Strayhorn
LIGHTING DESIGN/
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR Chris Kuhl
VIDEO ART AND SCREEN CONCEPT Cari Ann Shim Sham
SOUND DESIGN d. Sabela grimes
SCREEN DESIGN AND FABRICATION Mary Hale
COSTUME DESIGN Leah Piehl
DRAMATURG L. MSP Burns
TOUR MANAGER/ASSISTANT TD Katelan Braymer
PERFORMERS Bernard Brown
Raymond Ejiofor
Dezaré Foster
Jasmine Jawato
Kevin Le
Julio Medina
Samantha Mohr
Leanne Iacovetta Poirier
Kevin Williamson

*Text adapted from *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn* by David Hajdu,
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PROGRAM

Halfway to Dawn (2018)

“Five, six in the morning, we’d still be yapping. That was his favorite time in the world. The phrase he used was halfway to dawn... It wasn’t day and it wasn’t night... You’re half asleep. You’re half awake. Your resistance is gone - it’s like a truth serum. Your feelings just pour out.”

-Marian Logan; Civil rights activist, singer, Billy Strayhorn’s close friend

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COMISSIONED BY: ArtPower at UC San Diego; Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans; Kelly Strayhorn Theater; Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; NC State LIVE; REDCAT.

PROGRAM NOTES

In 1999, a commercial producer approached me about rewriting, choreographing, and directing the musical *Rose Colored Glasses* that Billy Strayhorn and Luther Henderson began but abandoned in 1956. Although that project did not make it to the stage, I was humbled by Strayhorn’s life path and vowed to someday return to the genius of his music. Though partly responsible for one of the greatest bodies of work in American music history, Billy Strayhorn (1915-67) remains largely unknown beyond the jazz community. With *Halfway to Dawn*, I am seeking to excavate the deeper truths of the life of this famously private, out and gay, artist, thinker, and activist. The piece conveys the facts of Strayhorn’s life through a video-projected timeline, while simultaneously exploring the emotional undercurrents of his journey through abstract video art, dance, and his own brilliant music. There is no relationship between the timeline and dances beyond their tones, textures, and throughlines of emotion.

-David Roussève

Jacob’s Pillow is committed to providing an environment that cultivates the celebration of the art of dance and its positive impact on community.

While in our theaters, please refrain from behavior that could disturb other patrons and performers during the performance. We ask that you: silence your cell phone; do not photograph or video record performances; keep your ticket with you at all times; observe that food and beverages are not allowed, with the exception of water; and please let a staff member know if you need help. Thank you for observing these House Rules so that everyone can have an enjoyable experience.

We are so glad you are here. Enjoy the show!

MUSIC

Recorded music performed by: The Dutch Jazz Orchestra; Duke Ellington and His Orchestra; The Ray Brown Trio; Darius deHaas; Dizzy Gillespie; Ella Fitzgerald & Oscar Peterson; Stan Getz; Duke Ellington

SONGS:

“Le Sacre Supreme”

Composed by Billy Strayhorn
Published by Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc.
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“Grievin’”

Composed by Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington
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Published by Sony ATV.
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Published by EMI.
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“Johnny Come Lately”

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“Take the A-Train”

Composed by Billy Strayhorn
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“After All”

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“Your Love Has Faded”

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“Hues”

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“UMMG”

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Music Rights Provided Courtesy of Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc.

“I’m Checkin’ Out Goombye”

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Published by Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc.
Music Rights Provided Courtesy of Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc.
Published by Sony ATV.
Music Rights Provided Courtesy of Sony ATV

“My Little Brown Book”

Composed by Billy Strayhorn
Published by Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc.
Music Rights Provided Courtesy of Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc.

“Lush Life”

Composed by Billy Strayhorn
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Music Rights Provided Courtesy of Billy Strayhorn Songs, Inc.

“Love Came”

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“Blood Count”

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“Lotus Blossom”

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FUNDING CREDIT

Halfway to Dawn was made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. *Halfway to Dawn* is a National Performance Network (NPN) Creation Fund Project co-commissioned by REDCAT in partnership with ARTPower at UC San Diego, Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans, the Kelly Strayhorn Theater, and NPN. The Creation Fund is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts (a federal agency). For more information: nnpweb.org. *Halfway to Dawn* was created with the generous support of UCLA Chancellor’s office research funds. *Halfway to Dawn* was created in part during a development residency at the Pillow Lab at Jacob’s Pillow, technical residencies at NC State LIVE, REDCAT, and Kaufman Hall UCLA, as well as a video art residency at NYU Tisch Dance. Fiscal sponsorship provided by Foundation for Independent Artists, Inc.: A non-profit organization administered by Pentacle (DanceWorks, Inc). Pentacle is a non-profit management support organization for the performing arts. More info at pentacle.org For booking information, contact Sophie Myrtil-McCourty, Lotus Arts Management. Tel: 347-721-8724; Email: sophie@lotusartsmgmt.com Website: lotusartsmgmt.com. For more information on the company or to join our mailing list visit davidrousseve.com. Follow the company on Instagram @davidroussevereadity and David Rousseve @davidrousseve

COMPANY

DAVID ROUSSÈVE (Writer/Choreographer/Director) is a magna cum laude grad of Princeton University and a Guggenheim Fellow. His dance/theater company REALITY has performed throughout the UK, Europe, South America, and the U.S., including three commissions for the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival. Other commissions include Houston Ballet, Ballet Hispanico, Cleo Parker Robinson, Dancing Wheels, Atlanta Ballet, and Ilkhom Theater of Tashkent, Uzbekistan where Roussève spent six weeks creating an evening-length work surrounding the homoerotic art of Russian painter Usto Mumin. In 2017, Roussève choreographed Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars* for director Anne Bogart, SITi Company, and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra; as well as the piece *Enough?* for the San Francisco duet company RAWdance, a work that asks whether dance can address social movements like Black Lives Matter. In June 2018, *Enough?* was performed by Lula Washington Dance Theatre at the Ford Theatres. Roussève has created three short films, the most recent screening at festivals in 11 countries and receiving 10 awards including four for "Best Film." Roussève has been published in collections by *Bantam Press* and *Routledge Press*, and was twice a Fellow in the Sundance Institute's Screenwriter Lab. Roussève just completed *Twit*, a feature screenplay based on his 2014 dance/theater work *Stardust*. In 2017, *Twit* was a finalist in two "Best Screenplay" categories at the Nashville Film Festival and a semi-finalist for the Los Angeles Outfest Screenwriter's Lab. Among others, Roussève's awards include a Bessie (New York Dance and Performance) Award, Creative Capital Fellowship, three Horton Awards, the CalArts/Herb Alpert Award in Dance, and seven consecutive NEA fellowships. At UCLA, Roussève is Distinguished Professor of Choreography in the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance. For the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture,

he has served as Associate Dean (2014-15), Acting Dean (2015), and Interim Dean (2015-17).

L. MSP BURNS (Dramaturg) has writings on the racial politics of performance, on the performance of race, and about the Philippines and its elsewhere published in several journals including *The Dance Research Journal*, *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, *The Asian American Literary Review*, and *The Writing Instructor*. Burns's monograph, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (Asian American Studies Outstanding Book Award in Cultural Studies 2014), is published by *NYU Press*. As a dramaturg, Burns has collaborated with notable artists such as David Roussève, R. Zamora Linmark, and TeAda Productions. Burns is currently at work on *Qnoum Kaun Khmer/I am Khmer*, a musical/movement performance with mixed race Cambodian singer/songwriter/dancer Tiffany Lytle. Among Burns's writing projects is *Personating Robots*, *Impersonating Humans*, a book on the racialization and a robot race. IG: @resistancecompanions.

D. SABELA GRIMES (Sound Designer) is a 2017 County of Los Angeles Performing Arts Fellow and 2014 United States Artists Rockefeller Fellow. grimes is a trans-media storyteller, sonic ARKivist, and movement composer cultivating a devoted interest in Afrobiquitous life practices. grimes has conceived, written, scored, choreographed, and produced several dance theater works including *BulletProof Deli*, Philly XP, *World War WhatEver*, and *40 Acres & A Microchip: Salvation or Servitude* from his EXPERIMENT EARTH sound-movement triptych. Recent creative projects include *ELECTROGYNOUS* (2017) and *Dark Matter Messages* (2018). *ELECTROGYNOUS* is a dance theater experience which articulates that Black gender qualities are infinite, multi-dimensional, and distinct manifestations of wombniversal

consciousness. *Dark Matter Messages* is a collection of live poetry, video projections, and music interwoven with improvisational movement meditations that realize AfroFuturism as a means to play within the nowness of impending futures. Moved by how Octavia E. Butler invents interrelated notions of humanness in her Parable Series, *Dark Matter Messages* dreams Butler's unfinished manuscript, *Parable of the Trickster*, into a live performance experience. On faculty at USC's Glorlya Kaufman School of Dance, he continues to cultivate Funkamental MediKinetics, a movement system he created that focuses on the methodical dance training and community building elements evident in hip-hop, Black vernacular, and street dance forms. grimes loves pancakes, declarative realness, and his kinfolk.

CHRISTOPHER KUHL (Lighting Designer) is a lighting and scenic designer for new performance, theatre, dance, and opera. Recent work includes: *Stardust* (David Roussève); *Inflatable Trio* (Lionel Popkin); *PANG!* (Dan Froot); *Home* (BAM); *The Parable of the Sower* (The Public Theatre); *Dog Days* (Los Angeles Opera); *The Object Lesson* (BAM, Edinburgh Festival, Sydney Festival); *The Source* (San Francisco Opera, REDCAT, BAM); *The Institute of Memory* (The Public Theater, T:BA Festival); *Straight White Men* (Young Jean Lee's Theatre Company, The Public Theatre, Kaai Theater, Centre Pompidou); *The Elephant Room* (St. Ann's Warehouse); *ABACUS* (BAM, Sundance Film Festival, EMPAC). He has received two Bessie Awards, two Ovation Awards, and a Sherwood, Drammy, and Horton award. He is originally from New Mexico and is a graduate of CalArts.

LEAH PIEHL (Costume Designer) has recent work that includes: *Romeo and Juliette* (Oregon Shakespeare festival), *Krapps Last Tape*, *Underneath The Lintel* (Geffen Playhouse), *Kings, Once*, *The Light in the Piazza*, *Mr. Wolf*,

*The Motherf**ker with the Hat* (South Coast Rep), *Race, Twist Your Dickens* (Kirk Douglas/Center Theater Group), *The Steward of Christendom* (Mark Taper Forum/Center Theatre Group); *The Most Deserving* (Denver Center Theater); *Intimate Apparel*, *Pygmalion*, *The Heiress* (Pasadena Playhouse); *Arcadia*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, and *The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* (A Noise Within); *Paradise Lost* (Intiman Theatre); *Bars and Measures*, *Futura*, *The Pain and the Itch*, *Tartuffe* (The Theatre @ Boston Court); *Hedda Gabler* (Antaeus), and *Full Still Hungry* (Ford Amphitheater). She designed the feature films *All Stars* and *BuzzKill*. Her work has been featured at MoMA, Art Basel Miami, and 2010 Whitney Biennial. Piehl has a B.A. from UC Berkeley and her M.F.A. in Costume Design from CalArts. More info at leahpiehl.com

CARI ANN SHIM SHAM* (Video Artist) is a wild artist who captures and floats images and reflects light for movers, screens, and musicians between lala land and gotham. She is attracted to things that sparkle, is a wild edible mushroom hunter, and a collector of antique doorknobs. She recently directed a music video for Joan Baez's *The Last Leaf*, is in beta testing on her own interactive inflatable sea anemone Shimmer, and in pre-production on her first feature film. Her favorite place to be is underwater, and her current movement practice consists of contact improv and free-diving with wild spotted dolphins in the Bahamas. Shim Sham* is grateful for the ability to have her work seen in notable venues around the world and for that work to receive its accolades, yet relishes most in that precious process of the making of the art and the longtime collaborations that this process fosters. She is honored to serve as a guide to young artists at NYU TISCH as an Associate Arts Professor of Dance & Technology and feels extremely lucky to walk the creative path for so long with David Roussève. More info at cariannshimsham.com

KATELAN BRAYMER (Technical Director & Tour Manager) is a Lighting Designer and Technical Director for theatre, dance, and opera. Recent Designs include: *You In Midair* (Danna Schaeffer), *Underneath*, *Silent*, *Forgotten*, *Kiss*, *A Taste of Honey*, *The Hairy Ape* (Odyssey Theatre), *MEAT* (Emma Zakes Green), *TIM* (Brandon Baruch), *Jocasta Project* (Ghost Road), *Free Outgoing* (East West Players), *K-A-D-VER* (LAPP), *ROSEWOOD* (Micaela Taylor), *Berlin Diary*, *Psychic Utopia* (Hand2Mouth Theatre), *Excerpts* (Samantha Goodman), and *Bi*, *Lydia*, *El Payaso* (Milagro). Technical Direction on tour includes: *Stardust* (David Roussève), *Inflatable Trio*, *Ruth Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Lionel Popkin), *PANG!* (Dan Froot), *Object Lesson* (Geffe Sobelle), and *Half Life* (Cloud Eye Control). Selected venues include: Jacob's Pillow, Kirk Douglas Theatre, 59E59, MCA Chicago, On the Boards, SFMoMA, and Bootleg Theater. Braymer is the Director of Production and Lighting for the upcoming Live Arts Exchange Festival (LAX). Braymer has been a Lighting Assistant at the LA Opera since 2011. More info at KatelanBraymer.com

BERNARD BROWN (Performer) is a Lester Horton Award and Westfield Emerging Artist Award recipient, and has performed with David Roussève/REALITY, Lula Washington Dance Theatre, Doug Elkins Dance Company, Shapiro and Smith Dance, and was a founding member of TU Dance. He was invited to perform with Mikhail Baryshnikov in Robert Wilson's *Letter to a Man* with choreography by Lucinda Childs. He has had the pleasure of working with Donald McKayle, Rennie Harris, Rudy Perez, Louis Johnson, Ann Carlson, and Tamica Washington-Miller. Brown received his M.F.A. in Choreography from UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance and his B.F.A. from SUNY Purchase. Brown's choreography has been presented at Royce Hall, REDCAT, ODC Theater, Highways Performance Space, University of Chicago, Southern

Methodist University, and has choreographed Scott Joplin's opera, *Treemonisha* for Skylark Opera. Brown is an Assistant Professor of Dance at Sacramento State University and a Certified Dunham Technique Instructor candidate. *The LA Times* has called him "...the incomparable Bernard Brown..."

RAYMOND EJIOFOR (Performer) is a Gates Millennium Fellow, earned a Masters of Public Health Policy from USC, and his B.S. in Decision Science from Carnegie Mellon University. He began his training under Judith Rhodes Calgaro in Arlington, VA and Dance Theatre of Harlem. Ejiofor has danced and created works with Daniel Ezralow, Ryan Heffington, Azure Barton, Lula Washington, Bryan Arias, Danielle Agami, Sidra Bell, Kyle Abraham, and Robert Battle. Ejiofor currently collaborates with various companies including Ezralow Dance, Ate9 Dance Company, Lula Washington Dance Theatre, Heidi Duckler Dance Theatre, Post:Ballet, and David Roussève/REALITY. Some of his credits include the 59th Annual GRAMMY Awards, MTV VMAs, Audi, Toshiba, Hermès, Samsung, Apple, Beijing Dance Festival, Springboard Danse Montréal, Israeli Opera House, and Lincoln Center: David H. Koch Theater. He has performed with artists such as Sia, Katy Perry, Pharrell, 30 Seconds to Mars, Little Boots, Fitz and the Tantrums, and Daft Punk.

DEZARÉ FOSTER (Performer) is native to Cleveland, Ohio where she began her dance studies at Newton D. Baker School of the Arts and Cleveland School of the Arts, before joining Cleveland Contemporary Dance Theatre (CCDT). Foster made a guest appearance in *The Wild Party*, which led her to becoming a Musical Theatre Choreographer. In 2007, Foster joined The Dancing Wheels Company, performing and touring for over seven years in collaboration with various choreographers. She has also performed in Dianne

COMPANY

McIntyre's *why I had to dance*; Cleveland Cavaliers' Scream Team; and multiple years at Cleveland Public Theatre's *Pandemonium*. In 2015, Foster moved to Ga'aton, Israel for the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company's MASA Program. After returning home, she choreographed *Labyrinth: A Tribute* on the Dancing Wheels Company and performed in Northwest Dance Project's LAUNCH Program in Portland, OR. Dezaré Foster is starting her third season as a Company Member with David Roussève/REALITY in Los Angeles, CA.

JASMINE JAWATO (Performer) was born and raised in El Segundo, CA. Jawato studied dance at The Studio Art of Dance in her hometown before receiving her undergraduate degree from the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance at UCLA. Jawato has performed both nationally and abroad for Michel Kouakou, David Roussève, and Kevin Williamson, and continues to teach dance and yoga in El Segundo. She is currently pursuing her multiple-subject teaching credential, in hopes to integrate her performing arts education into the classroom curriculum. Jawato is excited to be dancing in her second piece for Roussève and with this wonderful cast.

KEVIN LE (Performer) is a native of Los Angeles and a graduate of UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance. He began his dance training at the age of twelve under Jessie Riley's WESTSIDE Dance Project. There he studied and performed with choreographers Jessie Riley, Peter Chu, and Sonya Tayeh. During his undergraduate studies at UCLA, he had the privilege of performing with David Roussève/REALITY in venues throughout the U.S. that include Jacob's Pillow, The Krannert Center, and REDCAT. Since 2013, he has been touring with Kevin Williamson's *The Lost Boys* and *Trophy*—performing in Beijing, San Francisco, Austin, and New

York City. Currently, Le is a dance instructor and choreographer working in the South Bay of Los Angeles.

JULIO MEDINA (Performer) is an artist from Los Angeles. His work draws from various movement styles such as breaking, Latin social dances, and modern dance, engaging mediums such as movement, film, and text. Medina studied hip-hop on the concert stage and earned his M.F.A. at UCLA's Department of World Arts & Cultures/Dance. Beforehand, Medina completed his B.A. in Dance and Movement Studies at Emory University as a Quest Bridge Scholar. While there, he was a member of Staibdance Company until 2013. In 2009, Medina founded TrickaNomeTry (TNT) Dance Crew, a hip-hop crew that continues to perform in the Atlanta community. Medina is delighted to be an Assistant Professor of Dance at California State University, Long Beach where he teaches hip-hop and modern dance.

SAMANTHA MOHR (Performer) is a California native body-based artist, choreographer, and certified yoga instructor. When in Los Angeles, she collaborated as a performer with David Roussève, Laurel Jenkins, Jay Carlon, Rebecca Bruno, Nina Waisman, Flora Wiegmann-Laboratory of Embodied Intelligences, Art House, Lionel Popkin, Julien Prévieux, Victoria Marks, Elizabeth Leister, Maria Garcia, and Alexx Shilling. Currently based in New York, she was honored to join Elkhannah Pulitzer in her new production of Bernstein's *MASS* with Maestro Gustavo Dudamel at Walt Disney Concert Hall and with Maestro Louis Langrée for Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival. Mohr has also performed and presented shared works at REDCAT, the Annenberg Community Beach House, Highways Performance Space, LACE Gallery, the Los Angeles Municipal Gallery, Hammer Museum, Honor Fraser Gallery, Pieter Performance Space, and The Women's Center for

Creative Work. She holds a B.A. in World Arts and Cultures/Dance from the University of California, Los Angeles.

LEANNE IACOVETTA POIRIER (Performer) is originally from Columbus, Ohio. Poirier moved to Los Angeles in 2008 to attend UCLA, where she graduated magna cum laude with B.A. degrees in World Arts and Cultures/Dance and Communications. Upon graduation, Poirier was invited to join David Roussève/REALITY and toured the states with *Stardust* (2014). Besides dancing professionally, Poirier works actively in arts administration, assisting select artists, non-profit organizations, and dance companies, including David Roussève/REALITY, with administrative needs. She also served as Program Director for The Flourish Foundation for three years. Poirier has taught dance for 10 years and is the Co-Director of the UCLA Dance/Performing Arts Summer Institute. She currently resides in Charlotte, NC with her husband.

KEVIN WILLIAMSON (Performer) is an LA-based movement artist and Assistant Professor of Dance at Scripps College. A Lester Horton Award recipient, Bates Educators Fellow, and Center Theatre Group Sherwood Award Finalist, Williamson's dance works have been presented at venues including DanspaceProject, REDCAT's New Original Works Festival, Dixon Place, CounterPulse, LACMA, Austin's OUTsider Festival, and the Beijing Dance Festival. Williamson has created original works for LA Contemporary Dance Company and Loyola Marymount University, and choreographed opera/theatre projects for The Juilliard School, Yale Repertory Theater, Opera UCLA, Atlantic Theatre Company, Washington National Opera, and Geffen Playhouse. Williamson received his M.F.A. in Choreography from UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance and is a certified Laban/Bartenieff Movement Analyst.

REGGIE WILSON/FIST AND HEEL PERFORMANCE GROUP

DORIS DUKE THEATRE

JULY 10-14 | TICKETS START AT \$35

Drawn to the intense physicality of Shaker spirituality, the world premiere of *POWER* imagines what Black Shaker worship might have looked like and is fueled by research at nearby Hancock Shaker Village.

Reggie Wilson/Fist and Heel Performance Group; photo Greg Nesbitt Photography



UMANOOVE/DIDY VELDMAN

DORIS DUKE THEATRE

JULY 17-21 | TICKETS START AT \$35

"Joy at every turn" (*Scotland Herald*), London-based Umanoove makes its U.S. debut with *The Happiness Project*, an investigation into the seemingly endless search for fulfillment, in collaboration with celebrated violinist/performer Alexander Balanescu.



Umanoove/Didy Veldman photo; Chris Nash

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PILLOWNOTES

by Maura Keefe

The PillowNotes series comprises essays commissioned from our Scholars-in-Residence to provide audiences with a broader context for viewing dance.

In the opening moments of David Roussève's *Love Songs* (1998), a handsome athletic man enters the stage, dressed in standard postmodern dance costuming of a tight white t-shirt and wide-legged drawstring trousers. Incongruously coming out of that body, an elderly man's deep voice says: "Let me ask y'all something, do y'all like stories?" He looks out at the audience expectantly. The audience is largely silent. "When old country black people talk to you, you got to answer back," he reprimands good-naturedly.

David Roussève likes stories and he likes to tell stories. In that character from *Love Songs*, he states: "Where I come from, people like their stories almost as much as they like to tell them." Since founding his dance company David Roussève/REALITY in 1988, Roussève has explored a variety of stories and multiple approaches to storytelling through dance, film, theatre, writing, and now, with the evening-length *Halfway to Dawn*, biography. He tackles grand themes in his work, confronting race, sexuality, and gender from an embodied perspective. Again and again, Roussève explores choreography from his familiarity with the tradition of storytelling, attributing his fascination with character development to his upbringing. As he explains it, in the Creole tradition of storytelling, characters animate stories with singing and laughing.

Often his pieces include poignant, funny, masterful monologues. It is in those stories that Roussève first demonstrates that the worlds he creates, like the real world, are neither straightforward nor simple, presenting the complicated intersections of cultures and identities. His monologues introduce us to Roussève himself, to Roussève as a character, and to the worlds he mines. While the monologues certainly are about the stories themselves, they also function to make the audience comfortable. As he put it in an interview, his monologues say to the audience, "I'm gay, I'm African American, but I'm accessible, I'm charming, I'm the guy next door."

In a recent interview while at North Carolina State for a creative residency building *Halfway to Dawn*, Roussève explained that he made a choice to not attend either of the law schools he was accepted to when he realized that dance was the place where he could "empower his passion for relevancy in a larger social context." He went on to explain, "I saw this as a juncture where I realized what was missing, and the ways that I could use a choreographic voice to meld together something highly interdisciplinary and socially grounded." His journey from Houston, to Princeton, to New York, at the height of the AIDS crisis, profoundly shaped him. He noted in that same interview, "My own sense of activism was forever shaped by my association with ACT UP, the idea of disruption, of art as activism."

Carefully choreographed disruptions—danced, spoken—are a hallmark of Roussève's works. He has never been particularly drawn to neatly packaged stories following narrative conventions of a clear beginning, middle, and end. Even in solo performances, multiple characters and movement vocabularies vie for the audience's attention. Roussève shifts time frames and geographical locations, and then shifts them back again. In larger works, different performers slip in and out of inhabiting identifiable characters, with individual movement vocabularies. Some scenes are abstract, others representational. Some characters inject humor into works, while others imbue scenes with sorrow.

Pull Your Head Up to the Moon: Tales of Creole Women (1989) drew on tales from Roussève's grandmother's youth in Louisiana to contextualize his own stories in a present-day urban setting. With *Love Songs*, Roussève moved away from his family's anecdotes and into legends shared by African Americans. A sprawling, evening-length work, *Love Songs* had a narrative through-line centering on the tragic love between two African American slaves. He balanced their narrative against Italian and German arias, and suggested love stories familiar from Wagner operas such as *Tristan und Isolde*. By bringing together these two kinds of themes, Roussève interweaves high art and folk culture, oral traditions and musical conventions, Euro-American and African American cultures. *Stardust*, seen at the Pillow in 2014, paired two different elements for its musical score: original music by d. Sabela grimes with interjections from the past in songs performed by Nat King Cole. That sense of the past intermingling with the present is a companion to this season's *Halfway to Dawn*. The new work takes inspiration from the on and offstage life of pianist, songwriter, lyricist, and arranger Billy Strayhorn, longtime collaborator of jazz great Duke Ellington.

With *Halfway to Dawn*, Roussève explains, "I am seeking to excavate the deeper truths of the life of this famously private, out and gay, artist, thinker, and activist." Like much of Roussève's work, the complex identities of Strayhorn resonate. He invites us to consider Strayhorn in his historical moment, but also demands that we think about those same intersections of race and sexuality and how they manifest today. Roussève is a gifted storyteller, a seductive performer, and a skilled choreographer/director.

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