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At Dance Place, Verse Is Foremost

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Poetry, spoken and danced, delivered by a quartet of artists—two from New York, two from D.C.—provided much engaging fodder Saturday evening at Dance Place.

Titled “Black Expressions,” the program culled works from contemporary dance, hip-hop and spoken-word artists.

Among them, Will Power, a New York-based monologist and poet, had an overly rowdy group of 100 D.C. charter school kids nearly eating from his hand after his rousing and profound set. Drawn from his evening-length work-in-progress “Flow,” the piece involved Power, a long, lanky drink of water with a goatee, narrating his tales in the guise of three storytellers, while punctuating his invigorating rhyme with a spoken—and later clapped—backbeat.

Power’s rhythmic cadences gave his work a musical connection, but his background in theater grounded his piece in the dramatic.

With a few well-chosen gestures and a battery of facial expressions and poses, Power launched into a series of funny stories that by the end quivered with profundity. One about Fred and his army of roaches, who “freeze in the light and walk in the black,” ends with the urgent plea that “roach-on-roach crime is whack—we gotta find different approaches.” “Grandma’s Feet,” an ode to the poet’s

grandmother, was a metaphoric tour de force of naming and praising an ancient woman with her “Jambalaya, Jesus-jumpin’, medicine-makin’, herb-boilin’, never-give-up—rugged-divine feet.”

New Yorker Meoleake Jones used Rastafarian poet Muta Baruka’s “Dis Poem” for a solo that showcased Jones’s slippery, quicksilver athleticism. But in the second half, Jones’s “A Little of This, a Little of That,” also performed in billowy white blouse and pants, was so similar in style and movement to the first work that neither piece made a singular impression.

Washington’s Gesel Mason offered her solo “Search for Solace,” first performed shortly after Sept. 11. With some stunningly powerful images, from its simple opening—a billow of tossed white tulle framed by a pitch-black stage—to the defined contrasts between a curving arm gesture and a sudden grab, the work has found universality as Sept. 11 gets farther away.

Poetry inspired “Lateef,” a duet by Reggie Glass performed by Leonardo Torres and Nicole McClam, although the equal-partner dancing remained a static accumulation of poses and plasticity. Finally, the uncontrollable energy of those 100 D.C. schoolchildren unfortunately marred the first half of Saturday’s performance, yet when their teachers loaded them on their buses, the theater and the artists lost an opportunity to reach and teach a younger generation.