

# Time Out

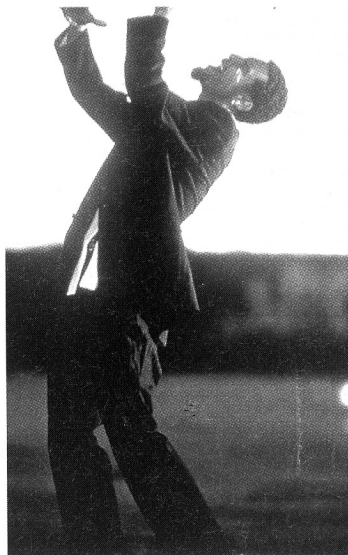
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## 'The Gathering'

**BAC O-WE**

**H**ip hop has become indelibly associated with guns and insults, a reputation rappers such as P Diddy and Snoop Dogg do little to counter. But hip hop's most engaging practitioners are poets at heart and more politically minded – and Will Power is very much among their number. He has previously toured with the band Midnight Voices and written a hip hop musical; this dynamic solo piece, however, takes equal inspiration from rap, jazz, blues and the rhythms of a basketball bounding across a court.

As a performance, 'The Gathering' dazzles. The piece explores black men's lives in America, and finds Power moulding his lithe body to conjure up the five personalities in an amateur basketball team, a hunched reverend, an alienated gay man, a crack addict and a manic teenage boy effervescent at being in love. Most astonishing of all are his veteran jazz musicians: the double-bassist arching his arms around his 'unpredictable, bombastic, effeminate' instrument, the pianist dancing over the keys, the drummer pounding out fragmentary sentences across the kit. Power illuminates the secret of appreciating jazz: each solo should be listened to as though it were a vocal line. His musicians play out messages of hope and admonishment to the hip hop generation, but what is said doesn't resonate as much as how Power says it.



To an extent, Power plays to stereotypes: there are no businessmen, for instance, apart from the barbershop owner. And his storytelling, particularly in the barbershop and basketball court scenes, can be diffuse. But such faults are easily overlooked when Power's Plasticine physicality is so striking, when he is so committed to creating characters whose thoughts, speech and predicaments feel keenly real. *Maddy Costa*