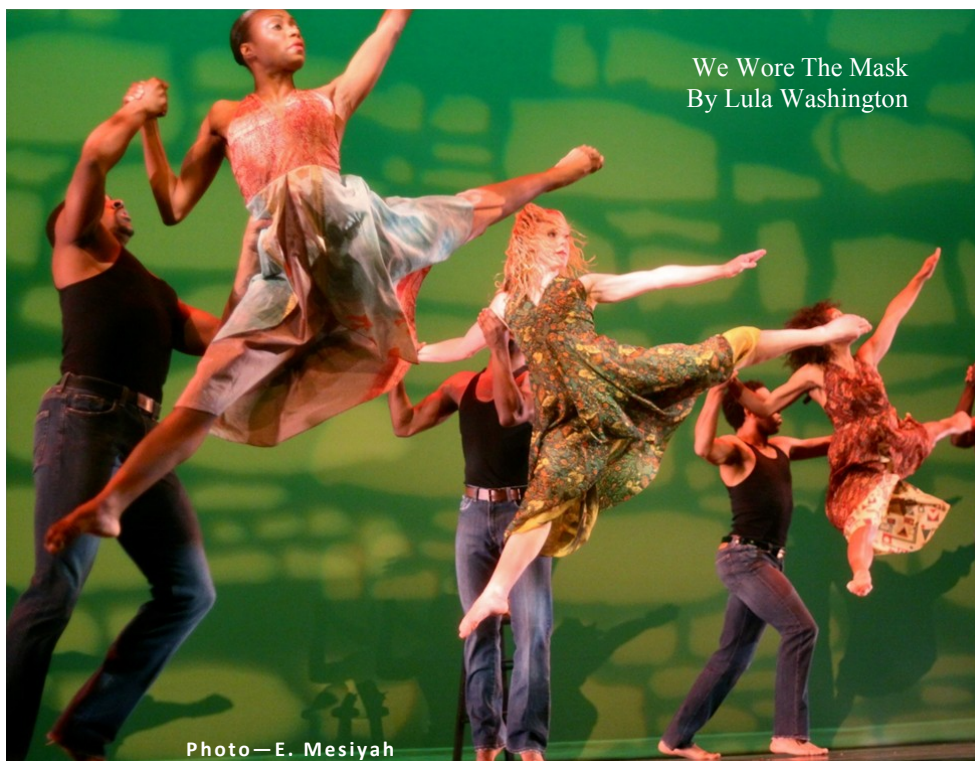


# Lula Washington Dance Theatre—Quote Sheet



## PRESS QUOTES

“As a choreographer and company director, Lula Washington is doing something more than right. At a time when flashy technique often seduces with surface dazzle, the Lula Washington Dance Theater projects a remarkably vivid mix of purity and dynamism. In short, there is a boisterous and refreshing quality about this marvelous interracial company from Los Angeles.” – **Anna Kisselgoff, New York Times.**

“Live jazz. Athletic bodies, jumping and undulating. Rousing, infectiously enthusiastic performances by fine dancers.” –**Roslyn Sulcas, New York Times.**

“Ms. Washington’s choreographic vocabulary comprises modern dance, low crouching and stamping movements inspired by African dance and, occasionally, ballet. It’s a perfectly pleasant and functional mix, and in “We Wore the Mask” Ms. Washington displays a sure theatricality that is captivating.” –**Roslyn Sulcas, New York Times.**

“The smart, strong and energetic Lula Washington Dance Theatre, celebrating its 25th anniversary ...**proved that American dance is alive, well and growing out west.** The handsome multi-ethnic company of 10 dancers provided an evening-long explosion of style and attitude.” This is an exciting company that inspires optimism about the future of American dance. -- **Sheila Abrams, New Jersey Recorder.**

“Ms. Washington is an original, in part because of the concern for social issues that informs some of her dances and the gentle but persistent way she addresses those issues.” -- **Jennifer Dunning, New York Times.**

“Washington’s troupe is now stronger than ever, able to enliven the choreography with a vivid expressiveness while performing at a level that is often simply jaw-dropping....Hands down this was one of the most profound performances not only of the year, but of a lifetime...” -- **Sara Wolf, Dance Magazine**

# Lula Washington Dance Theatre—Quote Sheet

## PRESS QUOTES

REIGN—By Rennie Harris

This blistering master work, *Reign*, choreographed by hip-hop guy Rennie Harris, rained down on Henan Province in June, performed by Lula Washington Dance Theatre during the Los Angeles-based modern dance company's three-week tour of China.

I saw *Reign* perhaps eight times and its syncopated, aerobic body logic never failed to mesmerize. And the Washington dancers -- on whom Harris created the ecstatic piece -- own it, they work it so hard. They kill in this piece.

—**Debra Levine, Huffington Post**



CHOICES—By Lula Washington

But then a compelling conversation between movement and music emerges; dancers echo (Terrence) Blanchard's running, trilling trumpeting with surging shakes side to side, and later on, a vertical throw of the arms ricochets through the group as unpredictably as the notes ring out in Almazan's piano solos.

—**Anna Reed, Culture Spot LA**



"www.connections.2010" by Lula Washington

This is an ensemble that pushes to the limits of the form and incorporates much of the rapidly changing digital age into the choreography. Case in point the first piece WWW.CONNECTIONS.2010 that juxtaposed the use of technology in connecting flesh and blood humanity. While couples connected with smart phones and text messages they also moved beautifully together with a harmony that only can be reached within a romantic heartbeat.

—**Glenn Creason, CerritosInk**



# Lula Washington Dance Theatre—Quote Sheet



Photo—Djeneba Aduayom

## PRESS QUOTES

“...her dancers show us pain, fear, anger, joy, reliance and defiance of black American lives...It’s been a long time since I literally got shivers at the theater...” –Albany, Metroland

“One of the most culturally and politically conscious dance companies in California... modern dance at its best. Exciting technique and challenging repertoire that provide food for the heart and mind.” –Honolulu Weekly

“Ms. Washington is a gifted original whose imaginative dance and theater intelligence was evident.”  
--Jennifer Dunning, New York Times

“ ...the unapologetically street-inspired Mahal Dances, could intoxicate any child into loving and appreciating dance as an art form, as it did this audience.” – Dance Magazine

“These abstract pieces treated dancers as objects in motion, yet managed to pull human stories from them all the same.” – Arizona Republic

# Lula Washington Dance Theatre—Quote Sheet



We Wore The Mask

By Lula Washington

## PRESS QUOTES

“The dancers' acting, dancing and occasional singing slowly transformed their wide-eyed expressions into mirrors for humanity, giving the piece's tragic end a striking power. One girl left the stage, chased by an unseen cop, and returned beaten and disheveled to die in Clark's arms as his singsong turned to a wail.”

-- **Clare Croft, The Washington Post.** (Re: LWDT in “Games” by Donald McKayle.)

“Washington’s choreography for her talented dancers set aside the “Nutcracker” story in favor of interpreting the music itself. The result was a splendidly diverse set of dances...all of it done with the high quality that is an essential element in the company’s performances.” – **Don Hickman, Los Angeles Times**

LULA WASHINGTON DANCE THEATRE - New Yorkers don't get many chances to see the work and company of this quietly innovative Los Angeles-based modern dance choreographer, whose blend of African and modern dance, ballet and performance art often expresses political and social commentary in the form of a folk tale, with humor and passion. Go for it.” – **New York Times.**

“Flyin’ With the wind [Dances for McCoy] was the highlight of this suite. Filled with unabashed joy and a new, more personal movement vocabulary and finally employing some unison phrases, we were, as a group, uplifted and flyin’ with hope and gladness. Ms. Washington does not leave us without her belief in the resiliency and faith of the human heart.” --**Madeleine Swift, Criticaldance.com.**

# Lula Washington Dance Theatre—Quote Sheet



Photo—Tom Caravaglia

## PRESS QUOTES

“There is an extraordinary piece within *Om* ...The ensemble performs remarkably with the bloodlust of ancestral imperative colored by memories of their own personal mutilations not so far in the past...We are left with an undeniable ember of hope that perhaps a new consciousness has been born within this individual woman and that this will serve to guide others who will come after her.” --*Madeleine Swift, Criticaldance.com.*

“They are a wonderful company. They are superb working with students.” --*Brian Bemel, Fred Kavli Theatre, Thousand Oaks, CA.*

“Lula and Company provided interactive thought provoking opportunities to nourish and foster change, that only special artists can!” --*Terry Yagura, Arts for the Schools, North Lake Tahoe, CA.*

“Very sincere and talented company. Lula is appealing and excites the audience with her spirit and love of dance.” --*Bill Martin, California State University, Northridge.*

“Washington’s choreography for her talented dancers set aside the “Nutcracker” story in favor of interpreting the music itself. The result was a splendidly diverse set of dances...all of it done with the high quality that is an essential element in the company’s performances.” – Don Hickman, Los Angeles Times

# Flights of Experience: Movement as History



Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times

Members of the Lula Washington Dance Theater performing "We Wore the Mask" at the Lincoln Center Out of Doors festival.

By ROSLYN SULCAS

Published: August 18, 2007 (The New York Times)

Live jazz. Athletic bodies, jumping and undulating. Rousing, infectiously enthusiastic performances by fine dancers. There's much to enjoy about the Lula Washington Dance Theater, which offered a generous evening of crowd-pleasing music and dance on Thursday night at the Damrosch Park Bandshell as part of [Lincoln Center](#) Out of Doors.

The charismatic Ms. Washington, who has done some remarkable grass-roots work in her native Los Angeles, offers her company as a physical embodiment of African-American experience and history. It's an ethos and an aesthetic most famously represented by the [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater](#), and Ms. Washington offers a similar belief in dance as terrific entertainment, and similar weaknesses in choreography that can look formulaic and too specifically designed to thrill.

But while the program may have been a little long — opening with a 30-minute musical set by Marcus L. Miller and Freedom Jazz Movement before the dance even began — no one in the packed audience was complaining.

Mr. Miller's band accompanied the first three dance works, greatly adding to the vitality and exuberance on stage. The opening and the most intriguing of Ms. Washington's pieces, "We Wore the Mask," set a lone, mythic and initially masked figure against two groups of dancers: a sextet in ordinary clothes and a quintet in baggy hip-hop gear.

Ms. Washington's choreographic vocabulary comprises modern dance, low crouching and stamping movements inspired by African dance and, occasionally, ballet. It's a perfectly pleasant and functional mix, and in "We Wore the Mask" Ms. Washington displays a sure theatricality that is captivating. But too often, group work becomes predictably repetitive and prosaic, and she has a tendency to build the dancing to a frenzied level and then let her pieces trail off, as she does in "Spontaneous Combustion" and the concluding fun of "Ode to the '60s."

Most interesting in the first half of the program was "Together," a duo choreographed and performed by Tamica Washington-Miller and Carvon (Taz) Futrell, to a slow, moody jazz score. The dance employed hip-hop technique but smoothed it out with silky transitions that transformed the nature of the movement in compelling fashion.

Ms. Washington is committed to preserving work by African-American choreographers, and it was wonderful to see Donald McKayle's 1972 "Songs of the Disinherited" in the second half of the program. Mr. McKayle's work is most frequently represented by a solo from this piece, "Angelitos Negros," and it was given a sincere, moving performance here by Keisha L. Clarke. But the whole work, with its restrained power and evocations of black history and religious spirit, deserves to be seen more often.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 08, 2010

# CerritosInk

*Reviews of shows from the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts and other local venues published by the Los Cerritos Community News. The writer and paper are in their fifteenth year of covering these events.*

## Lula Washington Dance Theater at Cerritos

By Glen Creason

The Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts seems to have become the place for excellence in modern dance as of late. Over the past season we have seen at least three of the finest companies practicing the art and on Saturday night hungry local dance-o-philes got another feast of the form from the Lula Washington Dance Theater. This troupe may mean just a little extra for local fans since Ms. Washington is a home grown artist, rising up out of the Nickerson Gardens projects of South Central Los Angeles and creating one of the most imaginative and vibrant concert experiences in modern dance. Certainly Lula Washington, a graduate of UCLA has done more than anyone in recent years around Southern California to bring the art of dance into the black community of Los Angeles. Of further interest is the active participation of associate director Tamica Washington-Miller who performed magnificently throughout the night and as a mature woman showed the mostly young group how the true art of dance comes from the heart and mind as much as it does from the body in motion.

This is an ensemble that pushes to the limits of the form and incorporates much of the rapidly changing digital age into the choreography. Case in point the first piece WWW.CONNECTIONS.2010 that juxtaposed the use of technology in connecting flesh and blood humanity. While couples connected with smart phones and text messages they also moved beautifully together with a harmony that only can be reached within a romantic heartbeat. During this segment there were themes that came unexpectedly to the surface now and then including the equality of women and the importance of electronic connectivity in communication. Part of the Lula Washington Dance experience is the lighting and on this night the bright colors and stark contrasts worked beautifully with the dance schemes especially in "Love Is" and the lengthy opening number that blended the music of Pachelbel, Michael Jackson and the Rolling Stones into one strangely cohesive statement. "We Wore the Mask" was marvelous with the passionate dancing of Tamica Washington-Miller and the unbelievably inventive drumming of master Marcus Miller. It's not often you get a standing ovation at the intermission but this piece left the packed house on its feet.

The second half began with a salute to the great tennis playing Williams sisters, Venus and Serena with the power, grace and even grunts of the great athletes expressed in a compact sequence of dance give and take. The remainder of the program was an absolutely dazzling set of pieces called "Ode to the Sixties" that was accompanied by pop music by Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Beatles, Bob Dylan and a perfect finishing kick from James Brown's "Super Bad." The choreography demonstrated an amazing variety of styles and moods drawn from the period and ranged from whimsical to political to just plain funky. Again, Tamika Washington-Miller lead the way on "Blowin' in the Wind" that managed to draw goose-bumps without saying a word outside of the atmosphere created with the movement of bodies. Lula Washington's choreography is multi-textured and filled with small nuances that may reach you after the performance as you ponder the marvels of the art of dance.

posted by Glen Creason | [3:29 PM](#)

# The New York Times

ON THE WEB

THE NEW YORK TIMES - Arts & Ideas Section  
January 15, 2000

## DANCE REVIEW

Lula Washington Dance Theater: A Funky Take on Black Heritage  
By ANNA KISSELGOFF

**As a choreographer and company director, Lula Washington is doing something more than right. At a time when flashy technique often seduces with surface dazzle, the Lula Washington Dance Theater projects a remarkably vivid mix of purity and dynamism.**

**In short, there is a boisterous and refreshing quality about this marvelous interracial company from Los Angeles.** It is neither slick nor bourgeois and it follows up its opening on Wednesday in the Altogether Different series at the Joyce Theater with two final performances tomorrow.

In a repertory that draws mainly from the black heritage, Ms. Washington knows how to instill both funk and fleet footwork in young dancers. There is also star presence from two eye-riveting performers, Nabachwa Ssensalo and Tamica Washington.

**Tragedy and tribulations are evoked, but the spirit triumphs. That is Ms. Washington's message,** and it is conveyed in both the astounding spring of her long-legged dancers and in their theatrical presence. It is no surprise that dramatic motivation is rooted in every move: Before Ms. Washington founded the troupe in 1980, her mentor was Donald McKayle, whose profound "Songs of the Disinherited" (1972) opened the program.

Movement is never decorative for Mr. McKayle, and this suite to spirituals and popular music is no exception. When Shari Washington-Rhone, flanked by Bernard Brown and Jeremy Tatum, leaps toward the promised land, you know that energy and faith will get the trio there. Bernard Jackson, elongated and wiry and Alexander Pelham, weighted and muscular, persuasively took another path in a duet.

Nothing prepares one for the mesmerizing and arched figure of Ms. Ssensalo, proud in carriage but sensual in the awe-inspiring serpentine shapes of the solo segment, "Angelitos Negros." Here is the black angel that the singer in the song of the same title finds missing from church altars.

**By contrast, Tamica Washington is fetchingly down to earth and hip-strutting sass in "Tasting Muddy Waters," choreographed by her mother, Lula. The wit of Waters's blues recordings is exploded by the image of the dancer cringing in terror. We do not see a rape; we see her reaction to the assault as she protects her body. We see her strength to carry on.**

Other pieces by Lula Washington tended to wind down. Set to a commissioned score by Bob Dale, "01997-8" offered a competitive and balletic courtship between Mr. Tatum and Kim Borgaro. The eclectic idiom, with elements of African dance, found its true center in the mock children's games that lead into country and western dancing in "Mahal Dances."

The dancers stand out as individuals. There is no missing the elegance of Keisha Clarke, with her Modigliani neck and comic edge nor the spiffiness of Mr. Brown's fireball style.



Rennie Harris's *Reign* Rains Down on China

Posted: 7/28/11 04:57 PM ET

A woman stands at stage center, her knee-length black dress draping loosely over trousers. She's trembling. Flashing lights -- a disco? faux lightening? -- cut the stage's darkness. The sound of thunder, then rain, pours from the speakers. It's loud, overpowering. The woman suffers, she's convulsing; her corn-rowed hair flies in the syncopated rhythm.

A man rambles through, his footwork kicking. He's pounding the floor; it's demonic but beautiful. Later, the same man will soar in high, jagged leaps. Three others join in, handsome tidy men dressed in church attire; their white shirts gleam against black skin. Seven church-going ladies strut on stage, beauties all, garbed in red Sunday's best. Using hands to fan sweaty faces, they absorb the troubled woman in their swaggering, gospel-soaked parade.

In no time, the choreographer has introduced twelve bodies on stage and it's pulsating and rocking so hard it's difficult to take it all in.

***This blistering master work, *Reign*, choreographed by hip-hop guy Rennie Harris, rained down on Henan Province in June, performed by Lula Washington Dance Theatre during the Los Angeles-based modern dance company's [three-week tour of China](#).***

***I saw *Reign* perhaps eight times and its syncopated, aerobic body logic never failed to mesmerize. And the Washington dancers -- on whom Harris created the ecstatic piece -- own it, they work it so hard. They kill in this piece.***

Henan Province is not Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou; it's the hinterland, an interior place not fully participating in 21st century modernity. There's no less likely audience for the Guggenheim and Alpert Award-winning dance maker's *Reign*. And yet, very simple people in the culturally isolated Henan, considered one of China's poorest provinces, stepped up, watching earnestly despite music that must have been immensely foreign to them.

*Reign*, persists a full fifteen minutes, smoky, rambling, way-cool and so infectiously funky, that if you can resist the pull of James "JT" Wilconson's gospel-house mix, it means that you're dead.

The work illuminates Harris's genius in moving vernacular dance from club to concert stage, and in unifying the black church's holy roller past with a mega super hip nowness. What a wonderful talent.

Rocking, knocking knees; backward, jagged kung-fu kicks; low-legged duck walks; hands puncturing the air with splayed fingers; arms broken at the elbow; falls to the stage caught by one strong hand -- all of this wicked fresh movement pours forth from *Reign*.

Musky, mostly funky, the dancers soldier though Harris's physical demands -- so punishing they must either transcend, or perish. The lyrics echo 'He reigns, He reigns, He reigns from heaven above. He reigns forever and ever...'

Then comes a new message, 'I can go to the rock of my savior...' *Reign* proposes a place of solace, comfort, safety and certitude, reachable through the vibrant body. What on earth the Chinese got from this is anyone's guess. I watched thousands of them watching *Reign*. Most looked in total shock.



JULY 09, 2010  
BY ANNA REED

The Los Angeles Philharmonic's 2010 Hollywood Bowl Jazz series kicked off on July 7 with performances celebrating the glorious tangle of influences that produced and continue to develop jazz music worldwide. The star-studded, soul-stirring lineup included Cameroonian bassist and vocalist Richard Bona, New Orleans trumpeter Terence Blanchard in collaboration with LA's own Lula Washington Dance Theatre, and Nigerian Afrobeat artist/activist Femi Kuti with his 13-man band, The Positive Force.

After such gripping intensity, the entrance of dancers in Choices – choreographed by Lula Washington to excerpts from Blanchard's new album – initially feels disappointingly dissipated. Scattered thinly across the vast stage space, the dancers' serpentine arms and languid poses don't quite connect with Dr. Cornel West's recorded reflections: "justice is what love looks like in public ... braininess falls short of what it means to be human and making the right choices."

**But then a compelling conversation between movement and music emerges; dancers echo Blanchard's running, trilling trumpeting with surging shakes side to side, and later on, a vertical throw of the arms ricochets through the group as unpredictably as the notes ring out in Almazan's piano solos. In a setting that naturally overpowers the human form, Washington's work resonates where she partners effectively with the surrounding forces to reach us through the distance. When a wave of twirls sweeps dancers across the stage in a blur of swirling white just as a gust of wind rolls off the hillside and through the Bowl, the effect is sublime.**

West intensifies the choice of "what kina human being you gonna be" by asking in the same breath, "how do we prepare for death?" Our ultimate limitation heightens the significance of each decision, and Washington eloquently suggests this truth by distilling the action to a single, focused duet. Here, deliberate gestures – by turns passionate, fearful, and painstakingly careful – carry tremendous weight, and the couple periodically cracks under the pressure, circling their arms wildly to cast off the load.

**Music, words and movement surge and crash together in a final collage evoking the "history of black people in America." Dancers fly on-stage with exuberant Lindy kicks, and a woman in turquoise responds to Blanchard's rhythms with jumps like hiccups – bent forward at the waist and arms hanging loose in the West African style that lies at the root of American jazz, tap and modern dance. "Hope ... Katrina ... black bodies hanging from southern trees," West's deluge of words suggests endurance rather than resolution, and the dancers' flapping, stomping, grooving exit and the band's final blast testify to this spirit.**

Jazz at the Bowl 2010 continues July 14 with Smokey Robinson and Lizz Wright, and Lula Washington Dance Theatre next performs as part of the Grand Performances series, on July 30 at California Plaza in downtown LA. — <http://culturespotla.com/>

# Los Angeles Times

## Lula Washington: A life changed by dance

From creating steps for her dance troupe to moves for 'Avatar's' Na'vis, the African American choreographer has done it all.



Lula Washington, above, and members of her dance troupe rehearse for a tour... (Ricardo DeAratana / Los Angeles Times)

[January 31, 2010](#) | By Debra Levine

"There is no gum chewing allowed anywhere inside Lula Washington Dance Theatre," a sign warns on the dance academy's front door. Dwarfed by the big-box retail stores of Crenshaw Boulevard, the unassuming low-rise shell belies its explosive contents -- dance, music, kids, creativity. Enter the House That Lula Built, headquarters for Washington's school and her touring modern dance troupe and a place where you'd better leave fooling around on the sidewalk.

Washington, 59, is Los Angeles' best-known African American choreographer, a community organizer and an advocate for the arts. She takes dancing dead seriously. Directing one of the few companies in the region that commands national attention, Washington is celebrating her troupe's 30th anniversary this year.

Over her career, she's seen the funding environment for the arts deteriorate to a climate that can be described only as hostile.

And yet she survives, initiating new projects as a concert dance maker and lately in film.

She's riding high since choreographing the movements for the Na'vis in "Avatar." And her company has bookings from New Mexico to New Jersey as well as L.A. dates this week at the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts and later this year at the Luckman Fine Arts Complex, the Hollywood Bowl (with trumpeter Terence Blanchard) and at downtown's Grand Performances.

# Los Angeles Times

## Lula Washington: A life changed by dance

(continued from previous page)

That's a lot of hustle.

In 2004, as she received California First Lady Maria Shriver's Minerva Award for women's achievement, the choreographer said, "Dance, for me, is life. You came into this world moving. Dance can change your whole life."

Washington's resolute tone offers clues to her staying power; her softness belies strong drive. It manifests in her 12-member touring ensemble, a multiracial tribe of real movers. It's evident in her eye-popping choreographic mélange of jazz, funk and African-derived movement fused into theatrical modern dance. And it explains how she's garnered top African American choreographers, notably Donald McKayle, Katherine Dunham, Donald Byrd, Louis Johnson, Rennie Harris and Christopher Huggins, to create dances for her troupe.

Beyond the concert stage, Washington's brand is deeply associated with community involvement. The school's annual Kwanzaa Celebration, now a Leimert Park Village holiday tradition, provides a robust outlet for neighborhood kids to channel energy while building self-esteem.

Every December for 19 years, Washington has unleashed a pageant of dance virtuosity on a packed house of beaming parents. The engaging performers, many with talent to burn, range from tap-dancing tots to the school's Youth Dance Ensemble on *pointe* to some serious senior citizens in dashikis and turbans. Directing this wild cabaret is Tamica Washington-Miller, Washington's daughter and protégée, who coaches from the wings as the three-hour show builds to its blistering finale: a squadron of percussionists propelling a half-hour of African dance.

A relative latecomer to dance, Washington grew up the oldest of eight kids in Watts' Nickerson Gardens housing project. Only after she saw a UCLA performance of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at age 22 did the onetime nurse conceive of life as a dancer. She committed to her career with the spiritual support of two men: her husband, Erwin, a playwright and journalist who is now the company's executive director ("I told her to pursue what she loves most in life and I'd take care of the money," he remembers), and McKayle, a choreographer who was then working in film and television. He has since contributed several of his works to Washington's troupe, adding historical weight to the repertoire.

Friends in high places sing her praises. Among them is "Avatar" filmmaker James Cameron. Seeking a movement language for his imagined world on the moon Pandora, he hired Washington to create a proprietary way of moving for the 10-foot-tall, blue-skinned members of his cast.

Cameron's producer-partner Jon Landau says in a telephone interview: "Since our early days [developing 'Avatar'] in 2006, we thought about bringing in a movement expert. But we wanted more than motion. We wanted emotion. Lula had the most insight into the motivation behind movement."

In her first meeting with the director, Washington offered Cameron the "third eye" greeting, a light finger touch to the forehead by the Na'vis. Her familiarity with ritual got her the gig.

"We wanted movements that were original but had a touchstone of the familiar." Landau said. "She said, 'This gesture here is a sign of aggression; this gesture here is a sign of acceptance.' A nod means something across cultures. We wanted to lose the nod and find other ways to express those emotions."

29 May 2011

## Lula Washington Dance Theatre superb in Zhengzhou

Category: [Dance](#), [Reviews](#) | Tags: [lula washington dance theatre](#), [sias university](#)

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By Debra Levine / Arts\* Meme

There was no better place to be on earth — not New York, not Paris, not London, nor Beijing.

All of the action tonight was at a Roman-style outdoor amphitheater one hour outside Zhengzhou, PRC. That's the capitol city of Henan Province (pop: 94 million). There, at SIAS University, the 13 dancers of Lula Washington Dance Theatre kicked it in two majestic shows — the first to a house numbering 2,400 and the second, tonight, for approximately 3,000 Chinese college students and their families visiting on a graduation weekend.

The audience was chock-a-block; a dense wall of faces. Rows of them. You could witness the homogeneity of the Chinese nation. The hard-driving dance troupe more than delivered, earning the house's rapt attention.

The Chinese, as audience, are tough customers. They chit chat, nonstop, through everything. So to command dead silence, as happened on night one when Ramon Thielen killed in his highly technical solo, "Healers," and then, on night two, during an acrobatic pas de deux between Lynet Shigg and Micah Moch in "Love is ..." set to great music by Sigur Ros — well, that's a tremendous litmus test for performers.

Backing the stellar troupe, a sensational jazz combo under the leadership of Marcus Miller, with Kamisi Washington's boisterous bleatings on tenor sax, subtle bass work by Ardom Belton, and strong piano improvisations by Mahesh Balasooriya.

29 May 2011

## Lula Washington Dance Theatre superb in Zhengzhou

Category: [Dance](#), [Reviews](#) | Tags: [lula washington dance theatre](#), [sias university](#)

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It's a family affair with the Washingtons. Tamica Washington-Miller, second generation, is a high caliber dancer with a strong penchant for drama. A dance-world veteran, and film-and-theater-world aspirant, the beautiful Washington-Miller not only masters African and contemporary black vernacular dance, but has a rare gift of talking with her body, most effectively displayed in her mother's masterwork, "We Wore the Mask."

"Mask"s dance-drama relates to a deep, historic concept in Chinese culture — that of 'having face' and, importantly, not 'losing face'— a driving normative in Chinese social behavior.

So when Washington-Miller springs on the stage donning a grotesque mask, a frisson runs through the audience. It hearkens not only to the masks of Chinese opera, but it speaks profoundly to a culture that lived bereft of material accoutrements, and survived by managing with the 'face' they were born to inhabit. Face is *heavy* in China. Bingo, Lula Washington, this piece scored a Chinese bull's eye.

After Washington-Miller's gripping solo, she's joined by the company — the men, in black tees and blue jeans, the women, bare-legged, in scarf dresses; from there, the dance blasts off. Marcus Miller accompanies on drums, anticipating the dancers' actions; a one-man orchestra of funky percussion impelling a cast of seven.

How many American dance companies offer live art happenings like this on stage? Way too few.

Washington's troupe possesses spectacular physical and emotive powers. As a choreographer she encourages self-expression; and this particular group (she's had many over the years) takes the entree.



29 May 2011

## Lula Washington Dance Theatre superb in Zhengzhou

Category: [Dance](#), [Reviews](#) | Tags: [lula washington dance theatre](#), [sias university](#)

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Washington's male line-up – the astonishingly lithe and capable Michael Battle, who never disappoints; Dwayne Brown, long-limbed, limber, and handsome; Micah Moch, dancing so deeply he almost dances inside out, and Christopher Nolen who juxtaposes weightedness with unexpected fluidity — cannot match the great Alvin Ailey male corps per se. But they out shine Ailey guys with their transparent love of dance, funkiness and individuality. They're not about perfection. They are about manliness, and male artistry. They form a quartet to be reckoned with.

Washington's women constitute a group love-in. One prettier than the next, the queen bee of the swarm this evening was the technically proficient Haniyyah Tahirah, her beautiful ballet placement begetting a big-bird arabesque. Tahirah excels in the Washington perennial, "Angelitos Negros," a solo study by Donald McKayle about fierce Latina pride that's full of technical risk taking.

Then there is Lynette Shigg, beautifully trained with a ripped-for-action body ready to exceed every limit; she dances like she's looking for trouble. Queala Clancy: if only gangly gazelles were reborn as elegant, effervescent performers. Then the fiery April Wilkins, like Washington-Miller a solid, even great, dancer-actress. Spunky Mary Runkle, young, girlish, tantalized the Chinese audience. But blondes have more fun in China ...

This pitiless crew had not only a dance critic eating out of their hand; five thousand Chinese also succumbed to their charms, responding to their enduring hard work. Lula Washington Dance Theater leaves behind this huge cluster of Zhengzhou admirers. One of them, highly excited, asked me in Mandarin, "Lu-la Huaxundun zai Meiguo hen you ming ma?" i.e., Is Lula Washington terribly famous in America?

Well, I answered, somewhat. But let's just say "not enough."



**Lula Washington Dance Theatre**  
**"Dances for McCoy," "Om," & "Songs of the Disinherited"**  
**Center for the Visual and Performing Arts at CSUN,**  
**Northridge, CA**

**By Madeleine Swift**

Lula Washington Dance Theatre is not only a local, national and international dance company, it is also a widely recognized force for dance education serving a huge community in Los Angeles through their school, the Youth Dance Ensemble and a variety of Teen/Apprentice Workshops. They offer performances and workshops from elementary through high school through the LAUSD, as well. It is also, by the way, in its first year as the Resident Dance Company at CSUN. Last night, they gave their first performance at the Center for the Visual and Performing Arts at CSUN.



Lula Washington

Three of Ms. Washington's pieces were presented Saturday night.

*Dances for McCoy* – 2001 – Four excerpted pieces - made in collaboration with music by McCoy Tyner were up first.

*Flyin' With the Wind* was the highlight of this suite. Filled with unabashed joy and a new, more personal movement vocabulary and finally employing some unison phrases, we were, as a group, uplifted and flyin' with hope and gladness. Ms. Washington does not leave us without her belief in the resiliency and faith of the human heart.

There is an extraordinary piece within *Om*, the second ballet of the evening. It is the story of a young African girl about to be "circumcised"; a ritual amputation of her clitoris, practiced for centuries by ancestors with the belief that by doing so, the woman will be faithful to her husband. Though this piece is about 30% too long, it is filled with an unsparing horror, grief and outrage that does not let up. Coltrane's music is a perfect choice for this piece. The ensemble performs remarkably with the bloodlust of ancestral imperative colored by memories of their own personal mutilations not so far in the past. It is clear how pain and anger are perpetuated through the generations.

Ms. Washington holds our feet to the fire through the character of the "initiate", danced by the remarkable Nicole Smith, as she resists and finally succumbs to the forced submission of her own mutilation. She is left shaking uncontrollably at the end of this horrifying ritual. But, we are left with an undeniable ember of hope that perhaps a new consciousness has been born within this individual woman and that this will serve to guide others who will come after her.

Next came *Dance of Play* an excerpt from *Rites – 2000* meant to celebrate love, childhood play and to give homage to dance pioneers who came before. The parade of pioneers was slightly amusing. The choreographer herself appeared as a clown festooned with balloons, however, her performance was topped by the final duet which employed the great and joyful movement vocabulary for which she is known: waving arms, turned in kicking legs, wonderful fast head rolls, unbri-dled enthusiasm.

The final piece belonged to Donald McKayle, legendary choreographer and member of her board of directors. *Songs of the Disinherited* is a finely wrought suite of the enduring human heart that reaches out to others and up to God in its despair and joy. The dancers come together displaying a very fine, modern technique within clear choreography. Nicole Smith is again the dramatic heroine in her solo, *Angelitos Negros*, and she takes our breath away. Made in 1972, the movement is so specific and true to its theme that it breaks your heart and mends it again.

The Company won a raucous, standing ovation.

## Looking Back At Twenty Years Of Dance. - Review - Dance review

[Dance Magazine](#), by [Sara Wolf](#)

LOOKING BACK AT TWENTY YEARS OF DANCE LULA WASHINGTON DANCE THEATRE LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA AUGUST 5, 2000

**In a city where maintaining a company more than two decades is nearly miraculous, Lula Washington Dance Theatre's anniversary concert was indeed celebratory. The company's continued existence attests to Washington's commitment to persevering, overcoming and building toward the future. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed by either the state or local dance or African American communities, who share an admiration for Washington.** This public stature can work to her disadvantage when choreographic accomplishments are superseded by a more media-friendly image of Lula the community hero.

So it was enlightening to spend an evening dedicated to Washington the choreographer, witnessing old and not-so-old favorites that demonstrated the arc of her interests, as well as her company's technical excellence. **After eighteen months of near-constant touring nationally, Washington's troupe is now stronger than ever, able to enliven the choreography with a vivid expressiveness while performing at a level that is often simply jaw-dropping.** Washington incorporates a range of movement idioms--acrobatics, African dance, capoeira and social dancing--but always with an eye toward line, height and pinpoint accuracy. She is a rigorous taskmaster, and many of her dances showcase individual prowess or include ensemble sequences of grueling moves, repeated and layered with intricate footwork and a gestural torso. It's an additive strategy that builds rhythmic momentum and reflects Washington's drive to push her dances and her dancers.

For all the bells and whistles (and intriguing physics) of these displays, they are undeniably expressive and in service to the characters that Washington creates. Whether tackling a social issue such as homelessness, as in *Women in the Streets*, or creating a sense of community, as with the shimmying dance hall regulars of *A Duke for the 90s*, Washington creates compelling, identifiable characters that only rarely slide to the brink of caricature. At times, the logic of characterization may digress into technical pyrotechnics, as happened in an extended solo in *Reggae Suite*, a tribute to the music of Bob Marley that followed its endless, rolling beat just a bit too closely.

The lengthy evening (as these events representative of prolific creativity tend to be) was studied with outstanding performances by many company members. Kudos are especially due to guest artist Bernard Gaddis, formerly a principal dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Philadanco, who is capable of suspending his leaps long enough for one to hear him debate whether he wants to come down at all.

**But the highlight of the evening was Tamica Washington's breathtaking (literally) performance of Donald McKayle's "Angelitos Negro" from the classic *Songs of the Disinherited*. This daughter of Lula and Erwin Washington is a dancer of astonishing grace and ability who imbues her dancing with exceptional emotive wisdom. Hands down, this was one of the most profound performances not only of the year, but of a lifetime. This is an artist to continue watching.**

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