

Name
Bric Arts Media Bklyn Inc
Project Title
To support Ronald K. Brown to host a three-year residency to develop demand for contemporary dance among the residents of public housing developments surrounding BRIC Arts Media House in Brooklyn
Project Progress and Successes
<p>BRIC continued a three-year artist residency program with Ronald K. Brown and his dance company, Evidence, in partnership with the Ingersoll Community Center in the local NYCHA Housing Developments. The residency, which began in 2013, has now completed two years. This project uses contemporary dance to drive both experiential and observational participation in the arts among the community surrounding BRIC Arts Media House.</p> <p>BRIC is the leading provider of free cultural events in Brooklyn. In October 2014, BRIC celebrated the first anniversary of our new home, BRIC House, and the amplification of our accessible arts programming in this space. For 37 years BRIC has presented contemporary art, performing arts, and community media programs that reflect Brooklyn's creativity and diversity.</p> <p>During the second year of our partnership with Brown we continued to measure the success of this project based on our goals to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Develop demand for contemporary dance among Brooklyn residents who feel unwelcome in a traditional performance venue; 2) Provide a home and compensation for Ronald K. Brown/Evidence to partner with BRIC; 3) Activate BRIC House as a public space for dance; 4) Have a positive transformative effect on BRIC, Brown/Evidence, and the local community. <p>BRIC worked to address each of these goals by furthering the development of the project's four components: education, performance, socialization, and reflection. In this second year, we have once again seen the most success in our education and performance initiatives. Each element is reported on in greater detail below:</p> <p>EDUCATION</p> <p>Ronald K. Brown and members of Evidence continued teaching free dance classes that were open to the general public on Monday evenings from 6:30-8:00pm. These classes ran twice a month through December 2014, alternating location between the Ingersoll Community Center's gymnasium and the BRIC House Ballroom. We kept the location consistent, with BRIC on the first Monday of the month and Ingersoll on the third Monday of the month, to encourage return attendance. After rethinking the approach to the target population, in the spring of 2015 the classes began again on a monthly basis, with all classes now scheduled at BRIC House. This change freed resources, allowing BRIC to pursue new engagement strategies for the target population through the relationship with Ingersoll, and still allowed us to continue a popular program that was opening BRIC House to a diverse population who sought out this particular community dance class taught by Brown and Evidence company members.</p> <p>The classes remained a main point of entry into the project; as a key component in</p>

creating demand for dance. Attendance fluctuated, with a low of 10 and a high of 45, yielding an average of 24 students per class. The classes continued to attract mostly female participants (90 - 100% observationally) and a full range of ages from 7 - 73. When we look only at participants who attended more than one class, the age range skews older, indicating that, as was the case last year, older participants were more likely to return for multiple classes. The majority (70%) of participants were drawn from Brooklyn zip codes.

We conducted an in-class survey in the fall in which participants indicated their responses to questions by raising hands or by moving around the room. Unfortunately, on the day of the feedback survey, we had a relatively low turnout (10 people) so the data should be deemed not statistically significant and lacking in nuance. However, of those who participated, 100% indicated they would take a dance class again and 100% indicated that they would recommend classes to friends/family. In terms of further exploring their experience of dance, 70% indicated they would audition to participate in a dance performance, 100% indicated they had attended a live dance performance in the past, and 100% indicated they would attend a live dance performance or outreach event in the future.

The following anecdotes were shared by students:

- "I saw the class when I was at the center for 'shape' and I thought 'I want to do that'"
- "This class integrates everything that goes on at the center for me."
- "I am a Ron Brown 'groupie', I try to keep track of where he is teaching -- I love to dance."

Comments reflected two contingents that make up the majority of dance class participants -- those who are committed to Ron Brown and seek out his classes throughout the community, and those who are engaged at Ingersoll and connected to the program through the Community Center.

PERFORMANCE

Evidence's second six-week residency at BRIC House culminated in a series of six public performances that took place November 12-14 and 19-21, 2014. BRIC provided rehearsal and performance space and the infrastructure to remount *One Shot: Rhapsody in Black & White*, inspired by the life and work of photographer Charles "Teenie" Harris, who documented black life in Pittsburgh from 1936 to 1975. Through *One Shot*, Evidence explored the legacy of community and its evolution. The work incorporated video projections by Clifton Taylor and music by Anonimo Consejo, Billy Strayhorn, Ahmad Jamal, Mary Lou Williams, Arturo Sandoval, Mamadouba Mohammed Camara, Lena Horne, and Phyllis Hyman.

Based on our experience in the project's first year, we reduced the number of performances from ten to six, with the option to add a seventh show if there was sufficient demand. We hoped that by compressing the schedule we would achieve fuller houses, and through reduced expenses be able to share more revenue with Evidence. We ultimately decided to finish the run after six performances, but the final two performances were so popular that we could have successfully added a seventh after all. Moving forward into the third performance season, we know in advance that we will go ahead with this seventh show.

Evidence's run of performances at BRIC House featured two additional works by the company. In the first week (November 6, 7, 8) the show opened with *Order My Steps* (2005), taking its title from Psalm 119 and exploring the idea of seeing one's life as a

path. Order My Steps featured narration by poet Chad Boseman as well as music by Fred Hammond, Terry Riley, and Bob Marley. In the second week of performances, the program included Come Ye (2003), inspired by the music and sociopolitical legacies of artists/activists Nina Simone and Fela Kuti. This multimedia work demonstrated Brown's signature style of kinetic storytelling through African, Caribbean, modern, ballet and social dance to summon warriors, angels, and activists dedicated to the pursuit of liberation and peace amidst the struggles of human conflict. Come Ye included music by Nina Simone and Fela Kuti, and a video collage by Robert Penn.

BRIC worked with staff at the Ingersoll Community Center to raise awareness of the performances and make sure they were accessible. We invited members of the Center to view a free dress rehearsal. In keeping with BRIC's mission, prices for general admission also remained low at \$22 a ticket, with a \$16 option for students and seniors. A total of 717 people came to BRIC House to see One Shot during the run, filling 51% of the total capacity for all performances. The audience increased throughout the run, and by the second week, word about these moving performances spread so that the final two shows were sold out, with over 200 attendees each.

In preparation for the performances, BRIC carried out a multi-faceted marketing campaign that included distribution of 2,000 postcards via direct mail and street teams, targeting nearby community organizations. BRIC's public relations representatives also worked with media outlets to conduct targeted outreach in Brooklyn and ran listings in publications such as The New York Times, The New Yorker and Time Out New York. We also advertised locally in Brooklyn Based, Brownstoner, BAM Bill, and Fort Greene Focus.

Reviews were featured in several publications. The New York Times said of the performance: "There are certain givens in a dance by Ronald K. Brown. Deep, spiritual seriousness. A sophisticated mastery of stage space. Music that makes you want to move. A vocabulary, drawn from many parts of the African diaspora, that Mr. Brown has developed into a personal language that's flexible, richly expressive and irresistibly kinetic."

Following the performances, an onsite audience survey was conducted in the lobby and received close to 200 responses. Ticket buyers also received a survey via email after the show, now standard practice for all performances at BRIC House.

Here is a sampling of audience comments on Evidence's performance:

- "The range of emotions one feels when experiencing the works of Mr. Brown falls between spiritual, uplifting, soul stirring and inspiring."
- "I really enjoyed the quality of the two pieces, particularly the diversity of movement, and the expressiveness of the young dancers."
- "It was like worship and it touched my soul."
- "Ron Brown tells the story of Life Experiences and that to me is the strength and beauty of all of his works."
- "Truly creative melding of different dance traditions."
- "The performance was very inspiring and the "One Shot" segment really evoked the spirit of that time in American history."
- "Exceptional in every way. I felt like a giant smile throughout this performance. Love it."

Many responses also mentioned BRIC and the impression of our theater space:

- "I enjoyed the intimacy of the theater in which it was performed."
- "The staff at BRIC are amazing and the facility is gorgeous."
- "BRIC is inexpensive and intimate."

These professional performances at BRIC House have been coupled with other important performance experiences for members of the Ingersoll Community Center. During the 2014 season of BRIC's Celebrate Brooklyn! Performing Arts Festival, BRIC arranged free transportation and reserved seats at large-scale, professional dance performances by Shen Wei Dance Arts on July 17 and Dance Theatre of Harlem on July 31 at the Prospect Park Bandshell. Following the Dance Theatre of Harlem performance we arranged a meet & greet activity with the company. The Ingersoll attendees at that performance were largely students from the Center's existing youth dance program, so the opportunity to meet and talk with professional dancers, specifically from a largely African American company, was incredibly exciting and inspiring.

As a final performance initiative, BRIC hosted a dance recital by the Ingersoll Community Center's youth dance group, recently invigorated by a new teacher. The group calls itself Brooklyn Dance Theater and the program was called Legacy: Strength Truth Power, and included ballet, tap, and contemporary pieces performed by the students as well as works by guest company Rahway Dance Theater and a local Step group. Had the recital not been at BRIC House it would have been presented in the gymnasium at Ingersoll; instead the children were able to perform on a professional stage with the benefit of lighting and a proper tech rehearsal with our professional theater staff. BRIC continues to seek engagement opportunities like this that go beyond the initial plans of the project to enhance our connection with the target community. BRIC's Associate Producer was present for the day and welcomed audience members to the space, making sure to connect this program to other dance opportunities at BRIC. New York City Councilmember Laurie Cumbo was also in attendance and added words of welcome, emphasizing her joy at seeing BRIC make its space open to the local community in such a way.

Planning is underway for the third series of performances by Evidence in the fall of 2015. The dates have been set for November 12-14 and 19-22. Based on our experience in the project's second year, we will go forward with seven performances since there has been sufficient demand to accommodate an additional show. Evidence will perform *Blueprint of a Lady*, a dance portrait of Billie Holiday as well as opening pieces that highlight Brooklyn collaborators such as poet Cheryl Boyce Taylor and composer Philip Taylor.

SOCIALIZATION

BRIC hosted four free house parties throughout the year that were open to the general public. Free family dance classes that were thematically linked to the day's events were part of the programming for each of these day-long events. Students from the community dance classes and other members of the Ingersoll and Whitman housing community were invited and encouraged to attend these parties alongside our other neighbors.

Each BRIC House Party had a theme with a full day of multidisciplinary arts programming to engage audiences of all ages and activate every space within the facility. The first party, *Fela! Frolic* on October 11, was a BRIC-wide birthday celebration for the revolutionary African musician and political activist Fela Kuti. The second party, *Throwback!* on December 13 took a look back at Brooklyn through the decades. Then *Mapping Brooklyn* on March 14 explored artists who observe, collect, depict, and diagram all that is Brooklyn. Finally, *Spring Fever* on April 11 welcomed spring, renewal, and warmer weather at BRIC House. In addition to the family dance classes, other free programming included scavenger hunts in the gallery, board games, music, arts and crafts, and film screenings. At *Fela! Frolic* Ronald K. Brown and Evidence offered an open rehearsal of *Come Ye* in BRIC's Artist Studio, connecting their performance series with the House Parties, opening up their process, and allowing an even greater audience to

experience their work.

These House Parties have been widely attended, with audience numbers between 500 and over 1000. Given that these events are free and open to all, we have no simple way of tracking the extent to which Ingersoll/Whitman residents attended these events; however, we did conduct a survey of general participants for the first two events in the fall. Through this survey we discovered that the House Parties were the activity in the dance residency that attracted the most first time participants. Specifically, 78% indicated it was their first time at a House Party. In our analysis of participation by zip code, we found that 11% came from the area surrounding BRIC House, and an additional 64% came from other Brooklyn zip codes. People were motivated to attend mostly by the music or the dance party theme.

REFLECTION

This final component of the project originally aimed to use BRIC's community media resources to help Brown and his students document and disseminate their experiences. It became clear in the first year of the project that this idea was not going to be possible to the extent envisioned in the application. In the second year, BRIC, Brown, and Ingersoll re-thought their approach and focused on using writing within Legacy & Expression workshops -- a program devised by Brown for use in his community work across the country -- to accomplish this reflection and documentation. Both workshops concluded with a guided reflection by Brown in which attendees recorded their impressions.

Workshop attendees reflected on how the process changed their understanding of dance as a storytelling medium. They felt a strong sense of community in sharing their stories and being supported by each other. Many were surprised because they expected more of a movement experience and instead got an emotional journey. It helped them uncover an expressiveness that they did not know they had.

Here are some sample responses from this reflection:

- "I learned that sharing stories is a great way to express yourself through dance."
- "This workshop humanized the dance experience, and increased my love for this language as a profoundly humane expression."
- "Dance allows us to connect in so many ways and it is a medium for transforming ourselves/expressions and that our bodies tell the best stories."

Participants also shared ways in which they will apply what they learned in other aspects of life. Many reflected on the fact that they would share what they had learned about storytelling through movement with others -- students, trauma survivors, family members. Participants felt a greater sense of empathy and understand of the stories of others that they felt would be reflected in the nature of their interactions beyond the dance studio. Finally, participants felt they would be more proactive in sharing their own stories -- particularly with their families.

EVALUATION

In this second year of the project, we engaged an assessment intern from the community to work with the programming team. This allowed us to consistently collect data at dance classes, performances, and dance parties and to communicate more consistently and effectively to the project participants and members of the public about the variety of dance offerings at BRIC. To assess increased demand for contemporary dance in the community we recorded and assessed class attendance and audience numbers, looking at the balance of new vs. returning participants as well as the spread across age groups.

BRIC continued working with an outside evaluator at ARTS Action Research, Anne Dunning, to conduct a study of the project. Her work looks at all four aspects of the program, as well as the relationships among the project partners and includes a variety of approaches to understanding the impact of the program. A report on AAR's evaluation of the second year of the project is incorporated into this progress report as an attachment.

AAR has helped BRIC to assess where our programming is connecting with target populations and where it is not -- and to adapt programs to better address our intentions. They have helped us track some of the more intangible impacts of the programming -- especially in terms of the reflection activity.

Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project

Although the project succeeded in reaching a broad audience, it continues to be a challenge to engage the target population. Once again, the varying resources and capacity of each of the partner organizations made it difficult to implement the project as planned. BRIC has continued to take the lead in administration and production. Consistent communication with the Ingersoll Community Center and Evidence has proven to be a challenge.

Following the decision by all partners to re-focus the definition of the target population to a narrower group -- specifically a young men's group with strong leadership and consistent engagement at Ingersoll Community Center -- the scheduling of these events has been a major stumbling block. Evidence's touring and local teaching schedule has been difficult to work around this year, and communication challenges have not allowed us to work far enough in advance to avoid those restrictions. The partners are excited about creating programming for the young men's group; this is a population that would not likely otherwise be attracted to dance programming and one for which Brown and his team already have experience designing and delivering programming. While we have not yet succeeded in scheduling this new program element, all partners in the project are now committed to engaging with this group in year three of the residency.

When it comes to the performance and socialization components of the project, we have also continued to find it difficult to measure participation among the target population, since the programming is accessible to the general public, and events such as the House Parties are not ticketed or easily tracked.

What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?

We continue to find that it is important to facilitate a strong sense of mutual leadership among our partners. As the project moves forward it requires frequent opportunities to refocus the work in conversation with the Ingersoll Community Center and Ron Brown. Evaluation is ongoing, and we have to remain nimble to react to obstacles and adapt programming as necessary, which therefore requires a fair amount of staff time and constant oversight. We learned that our initial plans were too broad and diffuse, and we are now focusing more narrowly to better reach our target population.

Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.
http://bricartsmedia.org/performing-arts/long-term-residencies http://www.evidencedance.com/
If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N
If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).
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