

Remembering DONALD McKAYLE

April 6, 2018

THE DONALD McKAYLE LEGACY

LEA VIVANTE McKAYLE, *Artistic Director / Executor*

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Photo: Jack Mitchell



Donald McKayle at IABD Founders Showcase Saturday January 27, 2018, EL Camino College, Marsee Auditorium with Lula Washington, Cleo Parker Robinson, Debbie Blunden Diggs, and dancers Mathew Evans, Michael Green, Robert Pulido, Quentin Sledge, Devin Baker, Trezon Dancy and Quarrienne Blayr of Dayton Contemporary Dance Co.

In the words of Clay Taliaferro:

“Following an all-consuming deep rehearsal period with Donald for his 1967 production of Black New World, I knew in performance when I felt what was happening inside myself while dancing, that every moment had to be afire with my own raw fully exposed humanity to get the soul of the Black American on-going narrative translated right through our master story-teller director’s unapologetically definitive language of dance.

Yayee —Yah...”

In the words of Donald McKayle:

“In 1966 during continued protests of the civil rights movement producer Ellis Haizlip (Mr. Soul) and myself started creating “Black New World, a compilation of my works ready to travel in 1967 to be shared with the world, not just jazz but spirituals and folk music brought to the New World from African roots through slavery and freedom to the civil rights movement and onwards.”

DISTRICT STORYVILLE:

“New Orleans 1903...District Storyville...cradle of jazz...out to the graveyard the brass bands mourned death...coming back they screamed life...1917...DISTRICT STORYVILLE closed forever...but the music goes on...everywhere”



Sally Neal / William Louther



Clay Taliaferro / Sally Neal / Trina Parks



Donald McKayle



Loreetta Abbott



William Louther

In the words of Sylvia Waters:

“I have vivid memories of an extremely enthusiastic reception everywhere we went in Europe. Full houses really embraced the African American experience, the dancing, and the music.... with what seemed like endless curtain calls, rhythmic clapping, cheering and stomping. Truly heartwarming.”

In the Words of Lula Washington:

“Donald McKayle served on the Board of Directors of the International Association of Blacks In Dance and helped to shape the organization during its early years. He attended conferences and taught master dance classes for students who came from all over the US and the world to study with him. Mr. McKayle lectured on the history of black dance development in the United States.” “He shared stories about his life in dance – a life that encompassed the history of black dance in America.”

In the Words of Cleo Parker Robinson:

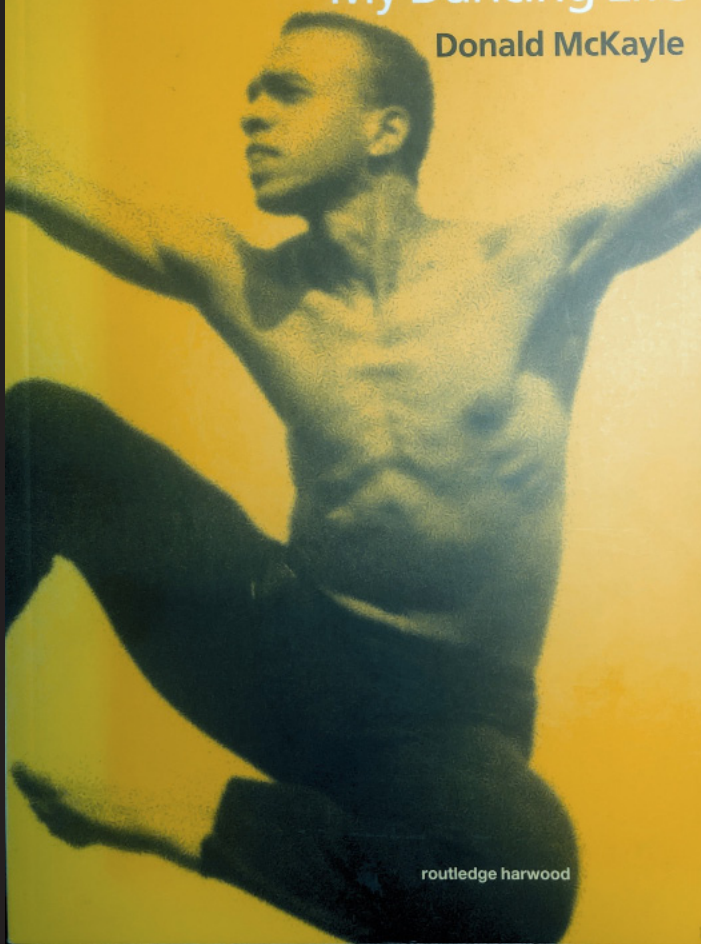
“Donald was such a beautiful spirit everywhere he was. He brought an energy and perspective that was always refreshing. And of course he had a laugh and smile and if you are lucky a song that stayed with you. What was phenomenal about Mr. Donald McKayle was how he worked and transformed dancers, whether they were super stars like Dianna Ross or his university students. It was pure love...love of his craft, love of the process, love of his dancers and love of the excellence and genius he witnessed daily.”

In the Words of Debbie Blunden-Diggs:

“Mr. McKayle’s contribution to the dance world is an enormous gift to the world! As a dancer working with him was like stepping in to a world of pure and clear imagination. Being able to share that experience with my dancers many years later in my role as artistic director was my chance to complete the circle.” My mother said, “Donald McKayle is a master storyteller, his works are magical!”

Transcending Boundaries My Dancing Life

Donald McKayle



"As I look back on that period, I am aware that there were companies and dance styles that did not open their companies to Black dancers. I now realize that it was not a political stand I was taking then, it was from the depth of my soul instinctual to a person growing up in an environment of many minorities and curious about their cultures ready to know them by participating in them finding beauty and value in their everyone's history. My realization was that - what is the same in us all is much more of value than what is different. I found the difference interesting and intriguing. I became enraged at injustice against any minority group. This was reinforced by the continuation of my choreographic life and works that followed relating to the Black experience such as GAMES, RAINBOW 'ROUND MY SHOULDER, and DISTRICT STORYVILLE, about the birth of Jazz, BLACK NEW WORLD, a compilation of my works that was taken on a world tour, SONGS OF THE DISINHERITED and LANGSTON HUGHES SUITE. I continued choreographing new works such as HOUSE OF TEARS, which deals with the atrocities of the military regime in Argentina and MYSTERIES AND RAPTURES for Cleveland San Jose Ballet where they performed the works listed above with the same passion, power and authenticity although a majority white company. I created HEART BEATS for the José Limón Company a work that expresses all that is common to humanity, a compilation of love songs from many countries around the world in many languages. In 2015 I created UPROOTED pero REPLANTADO, a work about immigration from south of our border but in it an expression of my opinion about the richness of diversity and immigration from all countries. In 2017 I choreographed CROSSING THE RUBICON - Passing the Point of No Return, describing the current plight of refugees from crimes against humanity in Syria. In an interview for Cool Magazine, the interviewer asked, "How would you characterize your work?" I said, "My work is very much from a humanistic point of view. I'm very interested in humanity and how we relate to each other. That's an ongoing process. I'm never without something to do because I'm always interested in how human beings are. I've done over a hundred works. Not all of them are recorded but those that are, you can take a peek!"

DM



Photos: Rose Eichenbaum

Crossing The Rubicon: *Passing the Point of No Return*
The Donald McKayle Etude Ensemble
McKayle's last work, world premiere February 23, 2017