

# The Charlotte Observer

## Fagan Dance Company is Dynamic at Every Turn

By Steven Brown

April 1, 2011

Garth Fagan must've been right at home when he choreographed a tribute to Romare Bearden, the Charlotte-born visual artist who was one of his mentors. One of Bearden's specialties was the collage, of course. And to judge by the program that Garth Fagan Dance, the choreographer's company, brought to the Knight Theater on Thursday, Fagan has his own knack for the mixtures and contrasts that make a collage so vital.

The whole show is a collage, using samples of Fagan's creations dating from 1981 to last fall, with a work by one of his dancers as another facet. Put together, they're a portrait of a choreographer - and dancers - intent on delivering atmosphere, vigor and feeling in every scene and solo.

But there's more to the collage aura than that. Within works or even scenes, Fagan creates crossplay all the time. Take the four parts of "Thanks Forty," which is the program's finale: Each of them has its own style and impact.

First, "Muse-Work" showcases a single rapt woman (dancer Nicolette Depass) who spends much of it balanced on one foot - or even just the ball of a foot. "Jump-Earn," accompanied by the frenzy of a Shostakovich cello concerto, creates its visual electricity less by the four men's jumping than by the ferocious stillness of simple gestures, such as the slash of an arm. "Heal-Pray," a paean to togetherness for four women, harks back to the sinuousness and buoyancy of African dance. "Fete-Joys," for the company's 14 dancers, is exuberant and glowing, letting the dancers revel in relating to each other. It's the payoff for all the emotions that the previous parts conveyed.

That last section, jubilant as it is, may give a reminder that Fagan won a Tony on Broadway for "The Lion King." He knows how to liven up the stage. But there's still nothing glitzy about it.

"Conjur Man," from the Bearden tribute, is propelled by a spirited Jelly Roll Morton number. Fagan conjures up a little street scene, if a prop that one man holds near the beginning - a panel painted like the brick exterior of a building - is any clue. As the dancers come and go, some of them convey the excitement of their individuality, others the showiness and flirtation of interacting with others. It's always alive, never predictable. That's true of everything in the show.