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DAVIDE BOZZALLA

Dancing with Giants

Bill T. Jones brings dignity to the Hult.

Some performers are so crystalline, their voices so fierce, their artistic words or moments chosen and developed with such precision and eloquence, that one might hazard to call them — dare I say it — geniuses. Bill T. Jones is one such Great.

With a signature movement style at once lyrical and dynamic, light and earthbound, Jones moves with élan, gracefully, but with power and conviction. As he has matured, his gestures have developed a range of subtleties, almost dialects, and the bodies he directs in the space seem to speak different languages.

**Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane
Dance Company**
7:30 pm Sunday, Oct. 8
Silva Hall, Hult Center
\$25-\$45

1988, Jones' work continued to develop along the path between artistic merit and political charge. Jones was one of the first postmodern choreographers to utilize a diverse group of human beings in his company. Short, thin, tall, fat, his dancers are refreshingly individuated.

His 1994 *Still/Here*, an homage to people living with terminal illness, was a tipping point for dance. In *The New Yorker*, Arlene Croce, infamously, refused to review the piece, branding it "victim art."

I saw *Still/Here* during its 1994 run, after a rather embarrassing personal moment. My

Technical mastery aside, Jones has historically explored bold theatrical choices, confronting topics such as homosexuality, race, protest and survival.

Technical mastery aside, Jones has historically explored bold theatrical choices, confronting topics such as homosexuality, race, protest and survival.

Too many artists seem to venture into these vertiginous caves and never find their way out. They'll scatter a pastiche of breadcrumbs for their audiences, but as pieces play out, some buckle under the weight of their lofty intentions, and their work succumbs to its fate as just another ham-fisted clunker.

But not Jones. Choreographically, he dependably avoids the maudlin by finding the sinews beneath: He teases out the pulse, discovers the connections and brings audiences closer to sometimes raw, always real, ideas.

Now Bill T. Jones returns to Eugene to present *Another Evening: I Bow Down*, and with a bonus: The evening's performance will be followed by a question and answer session with Jones.

Born in 1952, Jones discovered dance in college on an athletic scholarship. There he met Arnie Zane, who would become his partner and artistic collaborator. Together they founded their first company, American Dance Asylum, in 1973. In 1982 they formed their eponymous company, and their fruitful partnership produced such honored contributions as 1984's *Secret Pastures*, which featured sets and costumes by Keith Haring. After Zane's death from AIDS in

date for the night had forgotten her glasses, and with us running late and trying to find our seats, she swooped towards the center row of the theater, leaned over and informed a handsome, elegant man that he was in her seat.

"Oh, pardon me," said Bill T. Jones.

And then the choreographer and his companion shimmied down a couple of seats to accommodate us. The dance continues, finding grace and graciousness.

Years later, *Still/Here* is still with me — sad, evocative, and funny, real, with gorgeous movement and lush music. A requiem? No, a life force. I had never seen anything like it — a work that was about living with dying. And since *Still/Here*, I have seen countless pale imitations.

This time, with *Another Evening*, the work reaches towards disasters like Hurricane Katrina, the Mississippi flood of 1927, even Noah's ark. In this feature-length piece, Jones' company slices through the shadow between the personal and historical: What makes an event? What is real or meaningful? Is it the historical record? Is it media, books, personal stories and perspective?

Jones attempts to push further. In the face of adversity, do we fall into despair? If not, what makes us persevere? *I Bow Down* poses the idea that humanity pushes up through the cracks even in the worst of circumstances. Our warmth, our dignity, is in the way we get through.

EW