

Kyle Abraham | Abraham.In.Motion

The Radio Show (excerpt)

Photo: Steven Schreiber



NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE
CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS

STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

National Arts Centre, 2013-2014 Season
Cathy Levy, Executive Producer, Dance

The Radio Show student matinee

Date: Friday, February 14, 2014

Running time: 1 hour, including Q&A

Location: Theatre, National Arts Centre, Ottawa

Choreography: **Kyle Abraham**

Performers: Kyle Abraham, Beatrice Capote, Catherine Kirk, Chalvar Monteiro,
Connie Shiau, Eric Williams, Indigo Ciochetti

Costume Design: Sarah Cubbage

Lighting Design: Dan Scully

Music:

Preshow

Shirley Brown, The Chi-Lites, The Dramatics, The Emotions, Al Green, Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings, Al Wilson, Gladys Knight & The Pips, Laura Lee, Dorothy Moore, The Shirelles, Sylvia, Dionne Warwick, Bill Withers, Betty Wright, The Velvelettes

AM 860

Alva Noto, Beyoncé, Mary J. Blige, The Brothers Johnson, Exile, Aretha Franklin, The Fugees, Ryoji Ikeda, Ann Peebles, Jonnie Taylor, The Velvelettes,

106.7 FM

Antony & The Johnsons, Alva Noto, J.S Bach, Michael Baysden, Beyoncé, Eiffel 65, Exile, Sophia Fresh (featuring Kanye West, HudMo, Ryoji Ikeda, Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings, Klymaxx, Jena Knight, Lady Gaga, Mary Mary, Mtume, Eddie Murphy, Amber Lee Parker, Jay Sean, Slick Rick, Britney Spears, Jonnie Taylor, The Velvelettes, additional editing by Herman Soy Sos Pearl

***The mission of Kyle
Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion
is to create an evocative
interdisciplinary body of work.***

About *The Radio Show*

The Radio Show is broken up into various shorter works that blend my fondest memories of driving with my family and of listening to Pittsburgh's radio stations Hot 106.7 FM WAMO and its sister station AM 860. On September 8, 2009 WAMO, the only urban radio station in Pittsburgh sadly, went off-air.

With the turmoil surrounding the death of 16 year old Darrion Albert in Chicago discussed over the airwaves of radio stations around the world, I wondered how aware listeners were to the goings on in other urban communities around the country now that this voice had been taken away. Without black radio, where is the audible voice of the black community? Radio was so prevalent during times of strife in the past. Where is its place today? Is radio fading away? Are we still listening?

Reinterpreting those questions into the context of my father's diagnosis of Alzheimer's ten years ago and his more recent aphasia-afflicted conditions is where these losses of a voice find a common thread.

~ Kyle Abraham



Photo: Steven Schreiber

Kyle Abraham: Artistic Director/Choreographer

Dance-maker Kyle Abraham is seriously charismatic and hailed as “one of the brightest creative talents to emerge in New York City” in the last four years. Equal parts power and grace, he commands the stage, connecting directly with the audience. Winner of a Bessie Award, *The Radio Show* delves into the loss of voice (both of his father and a defunct urban radio station) with authenticity, heart and humor. The seven dancers are riveting: sizzling lines of energy, sinuous yet funky, elegantly articulated. The



movement is as loose as street dance, but as precise as ballet. With a classic soul/hip-hop score and elastic, electric dance, *The Radio Show* is an emotional ride that is operating on all frequencies!

Born into Hip Hop culture in the late 70's and raised with an artistic upbringing including classical cello, piano and the visual arts, Kyle Abraham approaches movement as a way to deeply delve into identity as it relates to personal history. From this approach, the work entwines a sensual and provocative vocabulary with a strong emphasis on sound, human behavior and all things visual in an effort to create an avenue for personal investigation that exposes itself on stage. A.I.M is an intentional representation of dancers from various disciplines and diverse personal

backgrounds. Combined together, these individualities blend the human experience of physical, emotional and psychological encounters to create a conversation of movement that is then manipulated and molded into something fresh and unique. Each convergence of dancing bodies is a new opportunity, a new discussion for the artist and audience to engage in and ultimately take with them when they leave the theater. Abraham.In.Motion is a proud supporter of Dancers Responding to AIDS.

The 2012 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award recipient, Kyle Abraham, began his training at the Civic Light Opera Academy and the Creative and Performing Arts High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He

continued his dance studies in New York, receiving a BFA from SUNY Purchase and an MFA from NYU Tisch School of the Arts. Over the past few years, Abraham has received tremendous accolades and awards for his dancing and choreography including a 2010 Bessie Award for Outstanding Performance in Dance for his work in *The Radio Show*, a 2010 Princess Grace Award for Choreography, a BUILD grant and an individual artist fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, a Jerome Foundation Travel and Study Grant, and selected in 2009 as one of Dance Magazine's 25 To Watch.

In 2011, OUT Magazine labeled Abraham as the "best and brightest creative talent to emerge in New York City in the age of Obama". His choreography has been presented throughout the United States and abroad, most recently at *On The Boards*, South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center, REDCAT, Philly Live Arts, Portland's Time Based Arts Festival, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Danspace Project, Dance Theater Workshop, Bates Dance Festival, Harlem Stage, Fall for Dance Festival at New York's City Center, Montreal, Germany, Jordan, Ecuador, Dublin's Project Arts Center, The Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum located in Okinawa Japan, The Andy Warhol Museum and The Kelly-Strayhorn Theater in his hometown of Pittsburgh, PA.

As a performer, Abraham has worked with acclaimed modern dance companies including David Dorfman Dance, Burnt Sugar Dance Conduction Continuum, Nathan Trice/Rituals, Mimi Garrard Dance Theater, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Dance Alloy, The Kevin Wynn Collection and Attack Theatre. In addition to performing and developing new works for his company, Abraham.In.Motion, Abraham also teaches his unique approach to post-modern dance in various schools and studios throughout the United States. He is currently working on a commission by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and a new pas de deux for himself and acclaimed Bessie Award winning dancer and New York City Principle, Wendy Whelan while still creating new works for his company A.I.M.



Performance Hall Etiquette

Curriculum Connection: *Grade 9 appropriate behaviour at performances*

Teachers: Help us ensure that everyone enjoys the performance!

As a teacher bringing your students to a performance at the National Arts Centre, please keep in mind that you are responsible for the behaviour of your students. It is up to you to ensure that the students behave in a respectful and attentive manner towards the performers on stage as well as NAC staff. Use the guidelines below to brief your students about behaviour in the performance hall before you attend your NAC performance.

- ✓ Performers on stage rely on the audience for the energy to perform: audiences need to be attentive, quiet and respectful in order to help create the magic of live performance.
- ✓ Performers can see and hear everything that you do, just as you can see and hear everything that they do, so:
 - Please save your snacks, drinks, candies and gum for another time - the performance hall is no place for eating and drinking.
 - Please discuss what you like and dislike about a performance - but definitely do it after you leave the theatre, not during the performance.
 - It is important that you be comfortable in your seat - but please don't leave your seat once the performance has started. It's distracting to those on stage.
 - Be sure to turn off cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps.
 - Cameras and video recording devices are strictly prohibited in the theatre.
- ✓ Dancers love to have their performance acknowledged by your applause, but remember to wait until the whole piece is over. Some choreographers choose to create dance in several sections. It may seem like the end of the piece when the performers come to the end of a dance. If you get confused about when a piece is finished, watch the performers on stage—you'll be sure to know when the piece is over when the lights fade to black then come back on and the dancers run on stage to take a bow.
- ✓ Remember that there are a lot of people who work very hard to put on a performance -- not just actors, dancers and musicians, but administrators, front-of-house and technical staff. Everyone will have a different opinion of what they see on stage, but consider that constructive criticism is always appreciated more than purely negative criticism.
- ✓ Through the performing arts we can explore other points of view, learn new and different things about ourselves and about others. Everyone who views a performance will experience it in a different way. It is important to respect this process of exploration in yourselves and those around you.

PLEASE NOTE THAT NO FOOD OR DRINK IS ALLOWED IN THE THEATRE.

Canada's National Arts Centre

The National Arts Centre (NAC) raised its curtains for the first time in 1969. Officially opened on June 2, 1969, **the National Arts Centre** was one of the key institutions created by Prime Minister Lester B.



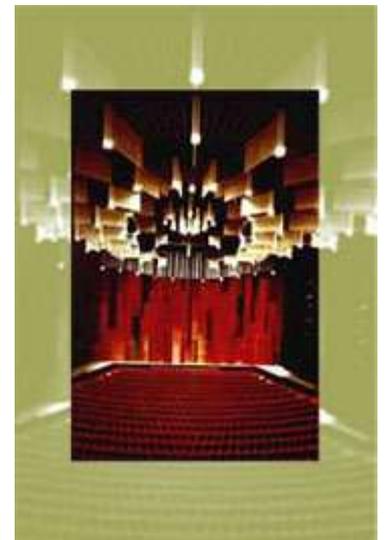
Pearson as the principal centennial project of the federal government. The NAC is the only multidisciplinary, bilingual performing arts centre in North America, and one of the largest in the world.

Built in the shape of a hexagon, the design became the architectural leitmotif for Canada's premier performing arts centre. Situated in the heart of the nation's capital across Confederation Square from Parliament Hill, the National Arts Centre is among the largest performing arts complexes in Canada. It is unique as the only multidisciplinary, bilingual performing arts centre in North America and features one of the largest stages on the continent. Designed by Fred Lebensold (ARCOP Design), one of North America's foremost theatre designers, the building was widely praised as a twentieth century architectural landmark.

A program to incorporate visual arts into the fabric of the building has resulted in the creation of one of the country's most unique permanent art collections of international and Canadian contemporary art. Pieces include special commissions such as, *Homage to RFK* (mural) by internationally acclaimed Canadian contemporary artist William Ronald, *The Three Graces* by Ossip Zadkine and a large free standing untitled bronze sculpture by Charles Daudelin. In 1997, the NAC collaborated with the Art Bank of the Canada Council of the Arts to install over 130 pieces of Canadian contemporary art.

The NAC is home to four different performance spaces, each with its own unique characteristics. *The Radio Show (excerpt)* will be performed in the Theatre, which seats 897 people.

Today, the NAC works with countless artists, both emerging and established, from across Canada and around the world, and collaborates with scores of other arts organizations across the country. The NAC is strongly committed to being a leader and innovator in each of the performing arts fields in which it works - classical music, English theatre, French theatre, dance, variety, and community programming. It is at the forefront of youth and educational activities, supporting programmes for young and emerging artists and programmes for young audiences, and producing resources and study materials for teachers.



Appreciating Contemporary Dance

The best way to appreciate contemporary dance is without expectations, without judgment. Think of it as your own personal adventure. The combination of movement, gesture, costume, and music all work together to take you on a journey. The adventure begins the moment you sit down. Just as when you go traveling, you may experience many different “landscapes” throughout a single dance performance. And remember, you, the audience, are an essential part of the performance. Without you there the show would not come to life.

Live theatrical performance is different than watching a movie. Don't expect the same experience. A contemporary dance show may or may not have a narrative, a storyline. The piece may be about shape, form and bodies moving through space – think of it similarly to how you would an abstract sculpture at the art gallery or of music.

As an audience member, you may feel you don't understand what you're watching. You're not alone. To avoid frustration and embarrassment because they don't “get it”, many people close themselves off to dance completely. However, they miss out on how dance can be exciting, thought-provoking, creative and enriching. Dance can make you see and think about yourself and the world in new ways.

The key is not to pressure yourself with trying to find “the meaning”. There is no right or wrong interpretation. Whether or not a dance performance suits your particular tastes, if you are open to the experience, you will get something from it.

All in all, enjoying a contemporary dance performance is quite simple: be open to new experiences, and let your intuition and your emotions guide you. Be open and receptive to what you are seeing on stage. Let yourself go: experience the different emotions, mental pictures and impressions the dance calls up in you. The key is not to pressure yourself. The truth is, you really can relax. There is no right or wrong interpretation.

***Dance first. Think
later. It's the
natural order.***
~ Samuel Beckett

How to watch a performance

Curriculum Connections:

Appreciation and Criticism – grade 9, 10, 11: Create criteria and analyze dance

History and Culture – grade 9, 10, 11, 12: Observe and describe dance

Each person watching may have very different interpretations about what they saw and how they felt. All are valid. Mental understanding is not the key in contemporary dance. Rather than trying to understand intellectually what is going on, instead, relax, take a few deep breaths, then open your body and mind to the dance. You needn't struggle to find a "message". Sometimes a performance just leaves you with a vague feeling, like an abstract painting or jazz improvisation.

At the Performance study:

- The movement and emotions expressed by the dancer
- How the dancers uses the space
- Your own moods in response to the show-- excitement, anxiety, curiosity, frustration, amazement, sadness
- The combination of patterns and shapes on stage
- The relationship between movement, sound, set and costume

Questions to contemplate:

- How does the dance make me feel?
- Do I recognize any of the gestures or symbols used by the dancers?
- Does the dance remind me of moments or events in my own life?
- What thoughts, ideas or images emerge for me?
- What meaning is there for me from this experience?

Remember, in understanding contemporary dance **there are no rules.**

***Dancing is just
discovery, discovery,
and discovery.***
~ Martha Graham

Post-Performance Activity: Variation on a Scene

Curriculum Connections:

Creation – composition, presentation and performance, grade 9 - 11: dance composition exploring a theme, composition for small group, cooperation and leadership

Subjects: Dance, Theatre

Materials required: Large studio space

Theme: Character, tableau, dramatic timing

Working in groups of three and four, select a scene or moment in the dance that you enjoyed or found moving. Recreate the scene adding three tableaux at points you feel are important in the narrative. Discuss with your group members the relationships between the characters, their feelings and reactions to each other. With each tableau point ask: What might have happened to bring us to this point? What might have happened following this point?

Language Arts:

1. Write a creative short story about your visit to The National Arts Centre. Use the following sentence as a starting point:

It all began when I sat down in my seat at The National Arts Centre to see Kyle Abraham perform...

2. Write a review of the piece. Research and read newspaper and online dance reviews to introduce the art form of writing for dance.
3. Write a poem or a story from the perspective of the life of one of the dancers in the piece.

Dance:

1. Discuss and name the different dance styles seen in the work. What similarities and differences did they have with other dance forms, such as modern, break dance, jazz dance, folk dance, Latin dance, ballet?
2. Compare the qualities of professional dancers with professional athletes. What are their similarities and differences?

Music:

1. How did the music affect or influence the dance?

2. Research classic soul music and hip-hop music. Describe their relationship to dance. Explore making dance to this music. What type of movements, speed, quality, and form does it inspire?
3. Learn about local music or dance groups that work with similar forms i.e. Bboyizm (hip hop).

More questions for discussion

- Research how art over the ages has been a mechanism for social change. How can dance be a form of social activism? Are some dance forms more political than others? If yes, which ones and why?
- How do hip hop and contemporary dance intersect in this work?
- Why do we see less hip hop on professional stages compared to other dance forms? And why do we see less contemporary dance on the street or in music videos or on TV?
- How is this work similar to, or different from other hip hop or contemporary dance pieces you've seen?
- Talk about your first impressions of the dance performance.
- What part of the show was your favourite?
- How were the various parts of the performance different? How were they the same?
- Describe the movements and choreography you saw; describe the music; describe the set and costumes.
- Discuss the relationship between choreography and dance, music, lighting, costume, set and props.
- What did the dancers express in their movements? Was there a story, or was it abstract? What was the choreographer hoping to communicate in the piece?
- Did the dancers express different emotions during the show? What emotions did you see?
- What emotions did you feel when watching?

Bibliography/Internet Resources

Kyle Abraham Website: www.abrahaminmotion.org and www.pentacle.org/kyleabraham

The Radio Show Preview: <http://vimeo.com/10347636>

National Arts Centre: www.nac-cna.ca

Dance and Art Education Websites:

ArtsAlive, the NAC's performing arts education site www.artsalive.ca

Council of Drama and Dance in Education (Ontario) www.code.on.ca

Kennedy Centre (USA) www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org

Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
www.phecanada.ca

National Dance Education Organization (USA) www.ndeo.org

Online dance publications

Dance Collection Danse www.dcd.ca

Dfdanse (French-language webzine) www.dfdanse.com

The Dance Current www.thedancecurrent.com

Dance International Magazine www.danceinternational.org

Writings on dance and making your own sense of abstract art:

<http://blueceilingdancer.blogspot.ca/>