

SYREETA HECTOR

Black Ballerina

KAAI THEATER

4 > 5/03 20:00 | KAAISTUDIO'S
WORK-IN-PROGRESS | DANCE | 45 MIN.

EXTRA Join us on Thu 5/03 for a post-performance talk with the artist, mod. by Ciska Hoet.



NL *Black Ballerina* vertrekt vanuit Syreeta Hectors verhouding tot ras en klassiek ballet. De Canadese danseres verkent de identiteit en de onbewuste manieren waarop we ons proberen te integreren. 'Ik wil onderzoeken hoe het lichaam van minderheden verbeeld wordt op scène, en hoe witte cultuur de relatie met mijn eigen zwartheid en inheemse afkomst beïnvloedde.'

FR *Black Ballerina* s'inspire de la relation de Syreeta Hector à la race et au ballet classique. La danseuse canadienne explore l'identité et les manières inconscientes dont nous tentons de nous intégrer. « Je voulais examiner la façon dont le corps des minorités est représenté sur scène et dont la culture blanche a influencé ma négritude et mes origines indigènes. »

EN *Black Ballerina* is based on Syreeta Hector's relationship with race and classical ballet. The Canadian dancer explores the identity and the unconscious ways in which we try to blend in. 'I wanted to examine how the body of minorities is depicted onstage, and how white culture has influenced the relationship I have to my own blackness and indigeneity.'

CREDITS



CREATOR AND PERFORMER Syreeta Hector | **MOVEMENT DRAMATURGE** Seika Boye | **OUTSIDE EYE** J. Adam Brown | **SET DESIGN** Wesley Mckenzie | **SOUND DESIGN/MUSIC** Gregory Reid, A Tribe Called Red, Jeremy Dutcher, Kendrick Lamar, XRNA | **LIGHTING DESIGN** Noah Feaver | **STAGE MANAGEMENT** Kiera Shaw | **CREATIVE RESIDENCIES** RBC Emerging Creator: Canadian Stage, Stratford Festival, Kaaitheater, workspacebrussels

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH BLACK BALLERINA

an interview with Syreeta Hector, by Chris Dupuis for Summerworks (August 2019).

Syreeta Hector's SummerWorks offering tackles her experiences as a mixed race woman entering the world a classical ballet. I caught up with her to chat about mining your past for ideas, diversifying the sector, and being ashamed to like dance.

SW: What was your starting point for this piece?

SH: My performance identity was the spark. I'm a mixed race dancer who trained where mixed race dancers rarely exist, in the world classical ballet. I thought it would be fruitful to reflect back on that time. Turns out there's some juicy fruit on that vine!

SW: I'm curious to know how you got interested in classical ballet in the first place. As a mixed race person, I'm assuming you didn't have many if any role models that drew you to the form.

SH: The high school I attended in North Carolina had an Arts Department. My dance teacher named Miss Allen was African American. Miss Allen was aware that I was from single parent family, and at the end of the first week in the ninth grade she got me a scholarship to take ballet class at a local studio.

SW: Ballet has historically been, and largely remains, a field that's closed off to people of colour. Are there concrete steps that institutions like dance schools, companies, festivals, and funders could take to address the issues you're raising in this work?

SH: Not to be a kiss-ass, but SummerWorks has taken some of those steps. There are performers who look like me, performers who look like you, and performers who look like the folks you just saw on the streetcar. Well maybe not on the literal streetcar, but I think you get what I'm saying.

SW: Why did you feel this piece was important to make?

SH: A part of every person's life, however fleeting, has been spent in the service of subjugating their own personality in order to fit in. We've all ignored aspects of our identity in order to be someone else. The specificity of my experience in ballet had a universal theme, which felt like a strong creative imperative. For a long time, specifically in North Carolina, I felt ashamed that I liked to dance. Black people would often say that I didn't belong in the dance classes. But the truth is that I didn't know where I belonged and I was struggling to find any grounding. It turned out that dance was a place to do that. So depending on where I was, I would take on different identities. If I was at the dance school, I was different person than when I around people that looked like me.

SW: What will people experience during the show?

SH: Contemporary dance is about individual interpretation. The experience is largely up to the person watching, as long as there is good material to interpret. My goal is to provide landmarks that build it up to a point where you feel there's something worthy of interpretation. In terms of the actual content, I guess I can say that I use a lot of props? They act as my duet partner on stage so, even though it's a solo, I'm never on stage alone.