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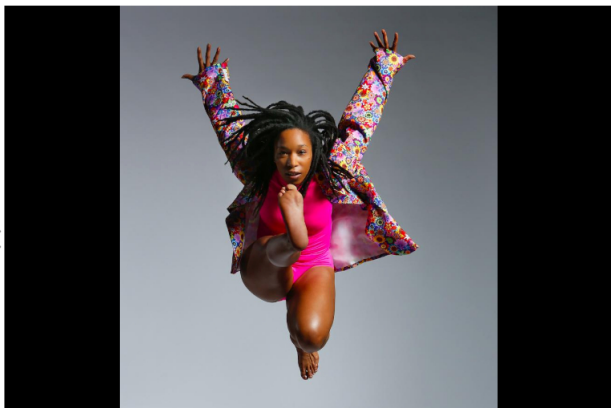
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Monessa Salley is part of the cast of Sarasota Contemporary Dance's production "SCD + Reverend Barry & The Funk" at the Cook Theatre in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts. [PROVIDED BY SCD / SORCHA AUGUSTINE]



By Jay Handelman
Arts Editor
Posted Dec 1, 2019 at 12:10 AM






Leymis Bolanos Wilmott, artistic director of Sarasota Contemporary Dance, draws inspiration from the music of James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind & Fire and more



SCD + Reverend Barry and the Funk: 7:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2 p.m. Dec. 8 at the Cook Theatre in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota.
Sarasotacontemporarydance.org.

As the sound of Prince singing "Purple Rain" fills a rehearsal hall, a dancer hidden under a silky piece of purple fabric glides across the floor on a small dolly, joined by two others. When the Rufus/Chaka Khan hit "Tell Me Something Good" starts, Melissa Rummel discovers the grace and playfulness of a pair of old roller skates, which she tries out with both her hands and feet.

The dancers of Sarasota Contemporary Dance will boogie their way through some unique styles in the company's latest program, "SCD + Reverend Barry & The Funk," being presented Thursday through Dec. 8.

Founder and artistic director Leymis Bolanos Wilmott is clear that "this is not a funk show." But she is embracing the spirit of the movement, "the essence of funk and what was happening at the time, embracing African-American culture, the sound, what people were wearing. It was bold. It was bright. It was glitter. It was a sense of liberation."

The hits of an era created by Earth, Wind & Fire, the Tower of Power, Prince, Khan, James Brown, Rick James, Aretha Franklin and more, have inspired a dozen new pieces that use the music, but not necessarily in the way audiences might expect.

"I felt like this show was to challenge the dancers as individuals and performers, to take what they can do and build on that," Bolanos Wilmott said.

In one routine, Xiao-Xuan Dancigers uses a push broom not so much to sweep but to depict a sense of longing amid the routine of a woman's typical day. In another, Rachel Lambright goes through her own work routine, repeatedly filling and emptying a backpack as she starts and ends each day in a hurried style.

The songs will be performed by Reverend Barry & The Funk, a local group of eight musicians which had a hit single with "LoveShine" and released its debut album "SxyGdLuv." The band will play familiar hits of the period, along with several original songs that will have their debut in the performance.

The live music brings an exciting element to the program, not without its risks, Bolanos Wilmott said.

"It's always different. It's never the same," she said. Dancers rehearse to recordings by the original artists and the band is known for its true-to-the-original cover versions.

"But it's a live performance and the tempos can be different. But the



dancers are flexible and work with it. It's exciting," she said.

The band is more accustomed to playing in clubs and bars, like White Buffalo "for all these people jamming and dancing to their music. For them, it's been interesting to come in and see us creating to their music, to see movement and my interpretation of the songs they play."

Bolanos Wilmott grew up listening and dancing to most of the older music featured in the show, but some of it is new to the company's younger dancers.

"Some of the company members are teaching classes and they learn such a range of music. Because we rotate through company members teaching, we're constantly being exposed to different music and ways of moving. That's the mission for his company. You have to be versatile. You need the ballet, but you have to be innovative and thinking on your own. You have to hone your strength."

But with all the empowerment talk, Bolanos Wilmott also stressed that the program is about playing and fun.

"With this particular show, I want our audience to just have a good time. We're dealing with so many things in our community and our country right now," she said. "Funk was a good time. Pushing through those circumstances reminds us that there's hope, and the power of the individual and our voices are all important. It's a sweet reminder of all that."



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