

Otis Sallid Celebrates The Music Of James Brown

February 14, 2014



*If anyone knows how to Get On The Good Foot, it's director, producer and choreographer **Otis Sallid**.

Feb. 14-16 for three performances only, Sallid will bring his latest project, "**The James Brown Project – Get On The Good Foot, A Celebration In Dance**" to the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles as part of the 11th season of Glogrya Kaufman Presents Dance at The Music Center.

The Show, co-presented by the **Music Center** and the **Apollo Theater**, will consist of an evening long dance work featuring nine choreographers from around the world, with different dance styles and backgrounds. It is the intention to bring a

unique and individual perspective to the music and the dance of the legendary soul singer James Brown, while examining a worldview of the music, the man and his international impact on contemporary culture and society.

The creator of Broadway's *Smokey Joe's Café*, who recently helmed the musical *Harlem's Big Otis Jump Up Blues Revue (a salute to Big Joe Turner)*, Sallid, a director, producer, composer, writer and choreographer, has been a fixture throughout the entertainment industry for decades. His accomplishments are not only impressive, they are too numerous to mention. He's had his foot in theater, television, film, the 1996 Academy Awards and even the 2006 Super Bowl.

A native of Harlem, Sallid attended the High School of Performing Arts in New York City and The Juilliard School. He has studied and worked with leading dance pioneers and legends including Martha Graham, Antony Tudor, Pearl Primus, Alvin Ailey, May O'Donnell, José Limón, Thelma Hill, Louis Johnson, Donald McKayle, Anna Sokolow, Lucas Hoving, Mary Hinkson, David Wood, Eleo Pomare, Arthur Mitchell, and Benjamin Harkavy.

A risk taker and innovator, Sallid has worked on several films for Spike Lee (*School Daze*, *Do The Right Thing* and *Malcolm X*) and recently worked on Fox Searchlight's feature film, *Black Nativity*, starring Forest Whitaker, Angela Bassett, Mary J. Blige, Tyrese and Jennifer Hudson.

I recently caught up with Sallid, who conceived and directs the show, to talk about his latest project.

DD: *James Brown Get On The Good Foot* – why?

OS: Here's the dealio. Two or three years ago there was nothing about James Brown. Nothing was done about him. I was incensed. I said, 'this can not be.' I'm at the point in my life where I can make a difference. He can't pass and no one speak about him. I'm always looking at ways to promote dance, especially dance of color. I went to the Apollo and wrote

a treatment. I said lets do something about James with dance. He's an international star. They loved the idea. I went around the world talking about it. I got this whole international crew together. They all had a James Brown story. He's an international classical musician. It's essential for people not to forget who he is.

DD: You know if you mess up James Brown you're in trouble. You'll have to turn in your black card.

OS: (laughter) Everybody had a story to tell. It's interesting that you say, black card. He's not a black card. He's a white card, an Indian card and more. He's a world card.

DD: James Brown: Get on the Good Foot, a Celebration in Dance. What can we expect?

OS: It's a celebration of James Brown set to dance.

DD: All kinds of choreographers have come together to celebrate James Brown.

OS: We touch on all levels. There is also the unexpected. There will be 90 minutes of pure soul set to music.

DD: What criteria did you use in deciding who you wanted to be involved?

OS: I asked them because they were proficient in their craft. In this case I was a curator then a director. I didn't say you do this or you do that. I was there to guide and then get out of the way. I wanted people who are storytellers and those who are truthful. I'm not going to tell people what to do. I wanted to see what people felt.

DD: Why is James Brown's work significant?

OS: He's one of our classical musicians. We say, Bach, Brahms, Beethoven and Brown. It seems like Black music is so disposable and that's so wrong. He defines what classical music is. We have funky, classical and Hip Hop James Brown. It can be what you want it to be.

DD: When did you become a James Brown fan? When did that happen?

OS: I can't remember. I always was. I'm a musical person. I always liked different dance styles and backgrounds. It is the intention to bring a unique and individual perspective to the music and the dance of the legendary soul singer, James Brown, while examining a worldview of the music, the man and his international impact on contemporary culture and society. Through the medium of dance, we will define and redefine, reflect, and bring insight to the performer who has changed the face of music forever. You can't speak the language if you don't understand the funk as a choreographer. He's the funk master. It's about the roots of his music. He's in our fashion, our walk, talk and hustle. He was everything.

DD: What is it about dance that moves you? Pun intended.

OS: It crosses cultures. It's a visual language. You don't need to say it. I can speak to everybody. It becomes clearer in the dance. When you can't say it, dance it. Even the coldest of hearts when they see dance, it melts. You give them dance and they will never pick up a gun. We dance because we have to. It changes things.

DD: Who else was an influence when you were first starting?

OS: I studied everybody.

DD: What are you most proud of?

OS: The thing that is coming up next is what I'm most proud of.

DD: What is it?

OS: You'll see it by the end of the year. Someone approached me to do *Car Wash: The Norman Whitfield story. I'm Wishing On A Star, Sunrise, I Wanna Get Next To You*. We did a workshop in California recently. As I've gotten older I've been able to bring all the elements together. This is a summation of all of that.

DD: Is there anything I didn't ask you that you want readers to know?

OS: Don't go to the show with preconceptions of what it should be. There are a lot of different dance and dancers out there. All of these choreographers have come together to celebrate James Brown. There is something there for everyone to love.

James Brown: Get on the Good Foot, a Celebration in Dance is co-commissioned by Glorja Kaufman Presents Dance at The Music Center and the Rialto Center for the Arts, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. Lafayette, LA partnered with the Apollo Theater to develop and mount the work prior to its world premiere at the Apollo.

James Brown: Get On The Good Foot, A Celebration in Dance, Ahmanson Theatre, 135 N. Grand Ave., Los Angeles, 7:30 p.m., Fri., Jan. 14; 7:30 p.m., Sat. Feb. 15 and 2 p.m. Sun., Feb. 16; \$28; www.musiccenter.org/jamesbrown or (213) 972-8555 or MCgroupsales@musiccenter.org

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