

*Relax.* That's what modern dance choreographer Bill T. Jones tells audiences to do in his video Blog.

([http://www.billtjones.org/new/bills\\_blog/2009/11/questions\\_on\\_fondly\\_do\\_we\\_hope.php](http://www.billtjones.org/new/bills_blog/2009/11/questions_on_fondly_do_we_hope.php)) Don't worry about it all making sense, allow what comes to you to come and see what you still remember tomorrow.

As a young dancer, Jones studied ballet and modern dance and then created his own company, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in 1982. Jones has created over 100 works for his company. His dance pieces combine spoken word with movement, collages of new and old music, recorded and live, video, set pieces, and costumes to create a theatrical experience unlike most other modern dance performances. His works tackle topics like slavery, race, sex, war, illness, and identity. Through the years he has challenged the stereotype of what a dancer must look like. His dancers are not all the same size, shape, color, or age. They are however all fantastic movers and distinct individuals and it is their individualism that Jones works with when creating a work. He allows and invites contributions from everyone involved in the piece – how it makes them feel and how it relates to who they are.

This is equally true of his latest work, “Fondly Do We Hope...Fervently Do We Pray”, a theatre piece based on Abraham Lincoln commissioned by the Ravinia Festival in Highland Park, Illinois to commemorate the Bicentennial of Lincoln's birth. The title of the piece comes from Lincoln's second inaugural address given less than a month before he would be assassinated and the Civil War would end: “Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away”. Jones weaves snippets of Lincoln's speeches in and among the biographical statements of his dancers juxtaposing past and present in an effort to illustrate the connections between them. How are we dealing now with the issues Lincoln dealt with in his own time - issues like civil rights, human rights, liberty and citizenship?

Jones calls himself an abstractionist, so don't expect a literal re-telling of Lincoln's life. And don't expect to find the “truth” about a man that many disagree about. Jones will present, as he usually does, a picture of a diverse landscape viewed from many directions at once with irony, wisdom, humor, and rhythm. So relax and enjoy the show – find your own connections and conclusions and maybe the experience will spark a conversation about what freedom means to you.

The piece will be performed at the Power Center on Friday and Saturday January 22 and 23 at 8pm and for those of you with middle/high school aged kids there is a Family performance on Friday from 4-6pm.