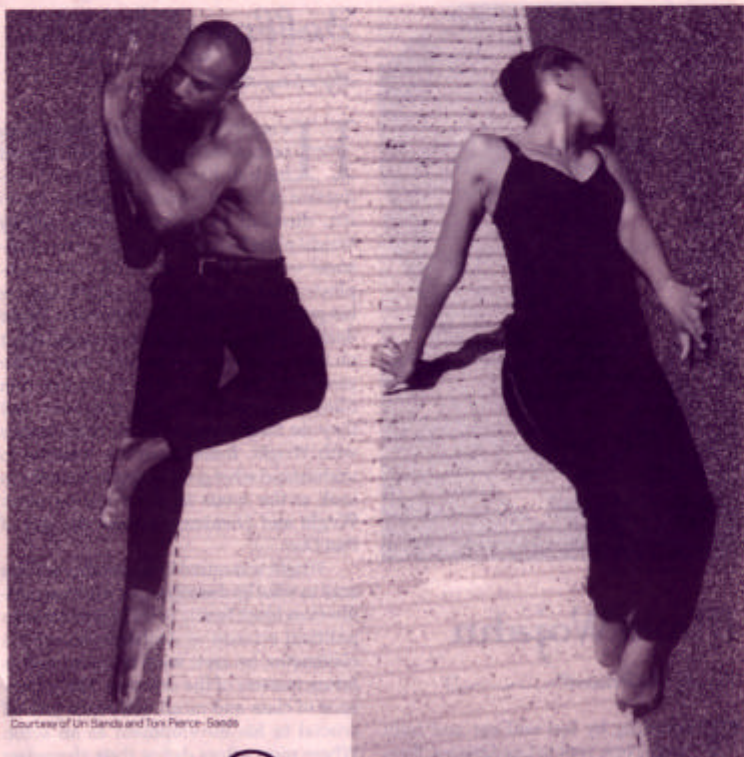


CITY PAGES

Artists of the Year

CITY PAGES December 31, 2003

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Courtesy of Uri Sands and Toni Pierce-Sands

Uri Sands & Toni Pierce-Sands

By Caroline Palmer

Uri Sands and Toni Pierce-Sands share the sort of communication familiar to life partners who are also creative co-conspirators. In a room filled with dancers, Uri will demonstrate a movement. And then his muse, Toni, will act as his interpreter, translating his intent with a kinetic language culled from years of, well, just knowing what he means.

Considered separately, the athletic Uri and lithe Toni are formidable and accomplished dance artists. Their careers, after all, were forged with the renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Together they complement each other's drive to succeed, but also—one expects, for the sake of a healthy relationship—they laugh quite readily at their intensity, rolling eyes and making jokes.

In June Sands and Pierce-Sands staged a short but impressive run of *SPACE-T.U.-EMBRACE* at the University of Minnesota's Barbara Barker Center for Dance (the show will be remounted in June 2004). Uri chore-

ographed the program while Toni served as rehearsal director and performer. The show skillfully combined elements of modern dance, classical ballet, jazz, and hip hop—plus West African and Indian forms—with a mixture of potent solos, duets, and group works. Several top local dancers formed the pickup company while Uri (who splits his time between the Twin Cities and North Carolina Dance Theater in Charlotte) prowled the stage to a Radiohead tune. Toni found a kindred spirit in Aparna Ramaswamy during an elegant duet showcasing the unexpected connections between modern and Bharatanatyam dance forms.

The evening was at its most energetic, however, in the large-scale efforts, including "Spirit: Lady," an ode to South Africa set to the uplifting vocals of Ladysmith Black Mambazo. More than a dozen dancers swept through the space in a celebration that threatened to explode out of the modest black box theater onto Riverside Avenue. The piece represented that most elusive of experiences for this sometimes jaded dancegoer: a rare moment of shared transcendence when the movement was all that really mattered.

Caroline Palmer is an attorney with the Minnesota AIDS Project and dance critic for City Pages.