

## DANCE REVIEW

# Collaboration and contrast

Meredith Rainey and Tania Isaac seamlessly combine styles as inspired by Ralph Ellison.

By Nancy G. Heller  
FOR THE INQUIRER

“I don’t roll on the floor,” said Meredith Rainey, one of Philadelphia’s best-loved (and tallest) ballet dancers, during the post-show Q&A. “It’s a long way down.” Yet, there he was Friday night at the Annenberg Center’s Prince Theater, doing exactly that, as he and co-choreographer Tania Isaac presented the world premiere of *(In)Visible*.

An hour-long piece combining movement and music with spoken text, this work was partly inspired by Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, a classic statement about the position of black people in white America. The choreography derives much of its power from poems written — and recited, in pre-recorded voice overs — by Rainey, an African American who for many years was one of the few dancers of color in the Pennsylvania Ballet, and Isaac, a Caribbean American



**Meredith Rainey (left) and Tania Isaac** in “(In)Visible,” inspired in part by Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel “Invisible Man,” at the Annenberg Center. ALEXANDER IZILIAEV

whose impressive resume includes stints performing with Rennie Harris and Urban Bush Women.

The struggle to find, and keep, one’s personal and artistic identity is para-

mount here, explored through a series of juxtapositions — of different types of music (Chopin piano works vs. a percussive electronic score by Jorge Cousineau) and contrast-

ing colors (black pants and shirt for him, white ones for her). Both dancers had to make compromises, with Rainey’s approach less lyrical than usual and Isaac’s, more so. The result: seamless, complementary movements that suggested these people had been working together for years — although this was their first collaboration.

Repeated gestures and poses (tracing a pattern down one arm with the other hand; slowly stretching into a back bend) helped unify the piece. The opening sequence, in which each dancer changed clothes in front of the audience, was a too-literal evocation of shedding one’s old artistic “skin.” But, paradoxically, the performers’ impassive facial expressions increased the emotional impact of the exquisite final image, with the dancers quietly standing face to face and slowly revolving, arms around each other.

