

February 5, 2012

Ailey troupe returns to Fox

More dance



Robert Battle, now leads the Ailey troupe. Andrew Cohen

'Daring' new steps

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater returns to the Fox Theatre Feb. 16-19 with Robert Battle, its new artistic director, at the helm. E10

By **Cynthia Bond Perry**
For the AJC

The curtain rises on the image of a singular rose. Baroque music plays as lines of athletic dancers leap and travel down the stage diagonally in broad, sculpted shapes; their expansive arms and twisting torsos sweep through space with elegance and vigor.

"What a bold statement about beauty," said Robert Battle, artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The dance, "Arden Court," is the first work by American master choreographer Paul Taylor to enter the Ailey company repertory and will be featured in the company's annual performance run, Feb. 16-19, at the Fox Theatre.

"As Battle makes his debut this season at the helm of the internationally lauded company known for its accessibility and explosive athleticism, "Arden Court" is part of a programming plan that's stretching dancers in new ways and gently pushing boundaries for the company's broad audience base.

"Arden Court" is daring, Battle explained, but not in an aggressive sense. "Daring could be saying that although there's aggression all around me, I'm choosing to celebrate the beauty of this rose," and how that beauty resonates in the dance. "It expresses hope, it expresses ecstasy and joy."

The piece is a nice balance to Rennie Harris' "Home," a new work geared toward reaching today's youth through the language of hip-hop. Set to a score of house and

gospel music, it's an uplifting piece about living with HIV, inspired by stories, poems and images chosen through Bristol-Myers Squibb's "Fight HIV Your Way" contest. Two of the contest winners are from the Atlanta area.

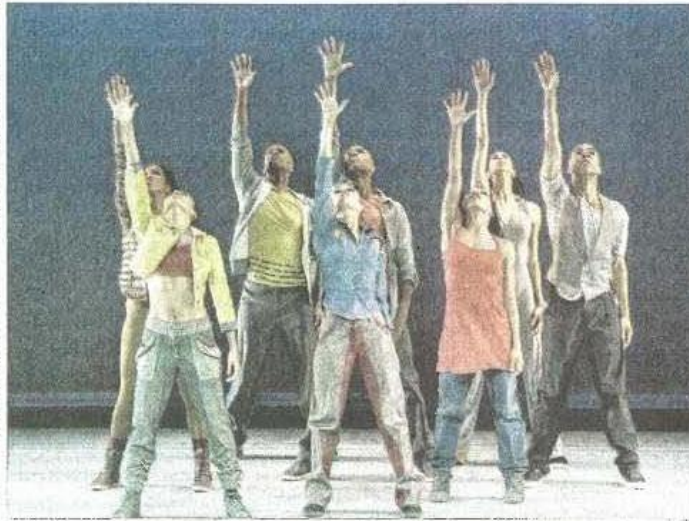
Through the purity of Harris' message and the intelligence of his choreography, Battle said that the Ailey dancers have found more personal expression, even as they've paid tribute to Ailey, who died from the disease 22 years ago.

In rehearsals, Harris told dancers about the club scene in the 1980s. Many people who learned they had HIV were turned away from their families and churches and sought community and release by going to clubs and dancing all night. Battle recalled, "People didn't say, 'Are you going to the club tonight?' They'd say, 'Are you going to church tonight?'"

"You see a lot of moments in it where the right hand is lifted as if you're in church and the other hand is on the heart," Battle said. "There's something [Harris] was trying to say about transcendence, about pushing through. A lot of the lyrics in the song keep saying, 'Push it through, push it through ... this place called home.'"

Programming also includes Battle's aggressive, athletic "The Hunt," his percussive, humorous solo, "Takademe" inspired by Indian Kathak's tightly woven rhythms; and Ailey's spiritually uplifting "Revelations."

Cynthia Bond Perry is dance critic at ArtsATL.com.



Alvin Ailey dancers find personal expression through hip-hop in Rennie Harris' "Home," an uplifting piece about living with HIV. Paul Kohrik



Linda Celeste Sims and Antonio Douthit perform in "Arden Court," the first work by American master choreographer Paul Taylor to enter the Ailey repertory. Andrew Focke

Dance preview

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
Robert Battle, artistic director

Feb. 16
7:30 p.m.: "Arden Court," "Home," "Takademe," "Revelations"

Feb. 17
8 p.m.: "Home," "Takademe," "The Hunt," "Revelations"

Feb. 18
2 p.m.: "Home," "Takademe," "The Hunt," "Revelations"
8 p.m.: "Arden Court," "Home," "Takademe," "Revelations"

Feb. 19
3 p.m.: "Arden Court," "Home," "Takademe," "Revelations"

Student day performances

10:30 a.m., Feb. 16-17:
"Revelations," "Takademe" and excerpts from "Night Creature," plus a behind-the-scenes look at the Ailey company hosted by one of the dancers. \$10.

More info

\$25-\$65. Student discount: 7:30 p.m. Feb. 16 show, \$10 with valid ID at Fox Theatre box office. Saturday matinee: buy one, half off second ticket. The Fox Theatre, 660 Peachtree St. N.E. (404) 881-2100, www.alvinailey.org, www.foxtheatre.org.