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Dance delights pupils

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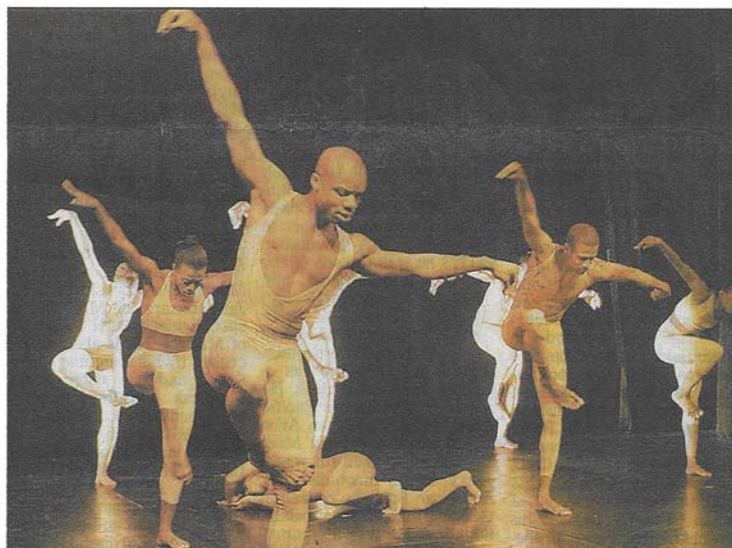
SPRINGFIELD – Springfield public school pupils screamed with delight at a performance yesterday by the Alvin Ailey II Dance Company.

“That’s what I want to do when I grow up,” said Aisha D. Gullet, 11, a fifth-grader at the William N. DeBerry School. Aisha was one of about 30 pupils who volunteered to go on stage to follow a professional choreographer’s moves.

The 12-member dance company, which did a mix of new pieces and Ailey classics at CityStage, is on a 43-city national tour that began Sept. 6. Sponsors of yesterday’s event included MassMutual and Baystate Medical Center.

Ailey, a world-renowned choreographer who died in 1989 at 58, is seen as a major contributor to modern dance for his fusion of classical ballet with jazz and ancient forms.

He founded the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, which continues operation in New York City under the direction of Judith Jamison, and the Alvin Ailey II Dance Company, created by Ailey in 1974 as a repertory ensemble. Ailey II does extensive community outreach, and the Springfield performance combined dance



Staff photo by MICHAEL S. GORDON

Members of the Alvin Ailey II dance troupe perform yesterday for Springfield students at a CityStage event organized by the city’s multi-sponsor Diversity Through the Arts program.

with brief discussions about a dancer’s life behind-the-scenes, choreography and Ailey Theater programs.

“We have a school in New York City where we train all our dancers, we start them out at the age of 2,” said Troy Powell, Ailey II’s associate artistic director. Powell also told the excited children about AileyCamp, a summer program for inner-city children held in several locations, including Boston. The AileyCamp programs for grades six through eight use dance to develop self-esteem and self-discipline, and boost creative expression and critical thinking skills.

The children eagerly volunteered when Powell asked for anyone to come on stage and

“show what you can give to Alvin Ailey.” Choreographer Ephraim Sykes demonstrated a series of graceful arm movements just twice before the students were asked to do it themselves, which they did with mixed success, erupting into giggles.

The dances Ailey II performed included the new “Celestial Landscape,” by Darrell Grand Moultrie, along with highlights of Ailey’s works from 1958 to 1984. Taken from Ailey’s “Blues Suite,” the pieces performed included “MeanOl’Frisco,” a muscular dance by five black-clad men, and “House of the Rising Sun,” a theatrical dance featuring three women in white lacy dresses. They company also danced Ailey’s ballet “Isba.”

“They were fantastic,” said Mary E. Worthy, principal of the DeBerry School.

“It was really inspirational ... something new,” said Nakhia N. Meadows, 17, a senior at Central High School.

Children from 10 Springfield public schools attended the event free, along with some community residents.

Sponsors included American International College, the Black Men of Greater Springfield, Elms College, Springfield College, the Springfield Department of Health and Human Services, Springfield Technical Community College, Unity First News, Western New England College and Westfield State College.

DANCE MOVES



Staff photo by MICHAEL S. GORDON

Choreographer Ephraim Sykes demonstrates dance moves yesterday for Springfield students at a CityStage performance by the Alvin Ailey II dance troupe.