



Alvin Ailey American Dance delivers breathtaking spring program

BY HEDY WEISS Theater Critic
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ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

- ◆ Through May 22
- ◆ Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress
- ◆ Tickets, \$30-\$87
- ◆ (800) 982-2787; ticketmaster.com

In just a little more than a month, Robert Battle will become artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater — only the third person, after Ailey and his “muse,” Judith Jamison, to hold that position. And anyone with a passion for dance — along with anyone who caught the company’s knockout Wednesday night performance at the Auditorium Theatre — might just consider him to be one of the luckiest people in the world.

Of course with such privilege comes daunting responsibility. Not to worry; the company also is exceedingly lucky to have him. Just watch his 2001 piece, “The Hunt” — a work performed by six of the Ailey’s most bravura, physically dazzling men (Clifton Brown, Antonio Douthit, Yannick Lebrun, Kirven James Boyd, Glenn Allen Sims and Jamar Roberts) — and you will see a choreographer capable of electrifying both his dancers and the audience. A work of male bonding (revving up before the hunt or other “warfare”), it has a primal intensity, enhanced by the percussive music of Les Tambours du Bronx, and it leaves spectators almost as exhilarated and spent as the dancers themselves must be. It is a piece that easily could be performed for the Navy Seals, or some special op unit headed into danger, and trigger precisely the dramatic adrenalin surge needed.

That galvanic energy, generated by a seamless mix of dramatic and athletic brilliance, also was palpable in the program opener, “Anointed.” Choreographed by former Ailey dancer Christopher L. Huggins, the piece, which debuted last year, serves as an elegant and thrilling homage to the passing of the torch — first from Ailey to Jamison, and now from Jamison to Battle.

Masterful in its lean but revealing conception and structure, and its Aileyesque mix of balletic, modern and Afro-influenced moves, “Anointed” unfolds in three sections. In the opening duet, “Passing,” an Aileylike figure (the towering and astonishingly graceful Jamar Roberts) lifts, cradles, and subtly but strongly directs the Jamison figure (the breathtaking Linda Celeste Sims) into the leadership role before turning into the darkness. Sims is a spectacular dancer of great technical prowess who can cement your attention simply with the steely perfection of a complete stop. And she returns (in purple) to lead the second section, “Sally Forth,” in which she is joined by four powerhouse handmaidens who support her work. The final “52 and counting” section features five couples in red-orange, dancing a soaring testament to the company’s future, with one man briefly tapped to suggest Battle.

The novelty piece on the program was Camille A. Brown’s “The Evolution of a Secured Feminine,” a solo work for female dancer (the sassy, aptly manic Rachael McLaren), who embodies all the tensions in a male-female relationship. This battle of the sexes with a twist is set to recordings by Ella Fitzgerald, Betty Carter and Nancy Wilson.

As ever, the program ended with Ailey’s spiritual masterwork, “Revelations” (preceded by a short film placing it in historical perspective). It was danced with the usual freshness and exuberance. NOTE: This lineup will be repeated on May 21 at 2 p.m. and May 22 at 3 p.m., with other mixed bills slated for May 19 through May 21.