

Online

Ailey Does Kylián, I Die of Happiness

By Margaret Fuhrer.
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Last night, I was able to snag a ticket to Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's "season preview" performance, a sampler of works from their upcoming New York City Center season. There was an excerpt from *From Before*, an earthy, polyrhythmic company premiere by legend Garth Fagan. There was the spankin' new *Another Night* by up-and-comer Kyle Abraham, set to Dizzy Gillespie's get-up-and-go jazz. Both pieces felt like classic AAADT fare: Vibrant, electric, seriously charismatic. Both, in other words, showed the audience a good time. But when the company performed part of Jiří Kylián's *Petite Mort*, I almost lost my mind.

Are you already a Kylián fan? If not, it's time to get educated, and videos of *Petite Mort* are a fine place to start. (If you're a fan of "Breaking Pointe," it'll look familiar—the show included footage of Ballet West's recent performances of the piece.) Kylián, who was the director of Nederlands Dans Theater for decades, has a sleek, calligraphic style. He's especially gifted when it comes to partnering—his pas de deux are fantastically knotty and yet seamless strings of shapes. His path from point A to point B is never the obvious way, but eventually it feels like the only way.

Petite Mort is technically fiendish, and for that reason it's usually performed by top-notch ballet companies. Ailey dancers all have solid ballet training, but I wondered if this work might be a little out of their comfort zone.

How silly of me. The entire cast looked wonderful, with Jamar Roberts and Alicia Graf Mack shining especially bright. What a gorgeous, impossibly long-limbed, elegant dream team! Alicia used to be the star of Dance Theatre of Harlem, and Jamar has danced with Complexions Contemporary Ballet. *Petite Mort* showed off all their best classical qualities—those *lines!*—but they, and the rest of the Ailey cast, also brought a unique richness to the piece. These dancers weren't just taught how to move; they were born to move.



The dream team: Alicia Graf Mack and Jamar Roberts in "Petite Mort." Photo by Paul Kolnik.