

Anointed/Alvin Ailey, City Centre, New York

By Apollinaire Scherr
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At *Revelations* on Friday, the gloriously craggy singer Ella Mitchell belted out the gospels while Judith Jamison in conductor mode coaxed a low, spooky sound from the chorus and students from the Ailey school dashed into the auditorium to mirror the drama onstage.

When the dancers slapped the air with their fans and threw back their heads to “Rocka My Soul”, the audience jumped up, ecstatic. Though they always rise for *Revelations* – it has become part of the ritual – this time the packed house was possessed.

Whether *Revelations* cracks the fourth wall or not, its mix of blood memory, pilgrim’s progress, popular music and populist faith has served as lodestar for the company repertory, though most works isolate a single strand from those that *Revelations* miraculously entwines.

The five-week City Center engagement includes snapshots of the Harlem Renaissance (Matthew Rushing’s *Uptown*) and spontaneous subway dramas (Camille Brown’s *Groove to Nobody’s Business*); glorified dance parties (George Faison’s *Suite Otis* and the team effort *Love Stories*); works to Ellington and Gillespie, played live by Wynton Marsalis and company; and spiritual journeys, the most recent of which surely contributed to the glowing mood on Friday.



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Taking flight: Linda Celeste Sims in Christopher Huggins’ ‘Anointed’

Ailey alumnus Christopher Huggins’s *Anointed* creates its fervour via the swift, seamless partnering, stretched limbs and curving torso, and constant motion of contemporary ballet. The idiom risks soporific sameness and relentless emotionality, and *Anointed’s* Moby soundtrack – like light at the end of the tunnel minus the tunnel – certainly pushes in that direction.

But the choreography is so enlivened by flight – the women gathered into the men’s arms like flower buds or suspended overhead like birds in flight – and so awake to human dignity that it escapes a banal end. We are spared the usual story of high-flying tumult – that we are flung about by fate (with women taking the role of “we” and men that of fate). Huggins strips no one of agency.

It helps that he interrupts the group sections with solos for majestic Jamar Roberts – his long arms wheeling and his torso hollowing out like a deep C – and for Linda Celeste Sims, at once piquant and inward, visceral and vibrant. Buried in these intimate moments is yet another Ailey tribute in this year of tributes – about those “anointed” to lead the organisation – but thankfully the dance does not demand that we exhume it. (★★★★☆)