



## **Junior Ailey troupe performs new works, repertory favorites at Folly Theater**

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By Libby Hanssen

The Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey presented Ailey II for a series of performances at the Folly Theater. Thursday's performance featured two premieres, kick starting the series.

This is the first season for artistic director Troy Powell, who has come up through the ranks of the Ailey organization from training to teaching, dancing and choreographing.

The show opened with Thang Dao's "Echoes," a beautiful dreamlike work. Quivering silhouettes in gray blue light began with rippling motion, sequences evolving to mimic the looping, repetitive lines from a string quartet. The music was a haunting score by Ezio Besso, heavily reminiscent of Pachelbel's Canon in D. Duets emerge from the ensemble, dancing in blocks of light, with sharp shadows. A series of lifts emerged from an amorphous corps.

The first of two premieres, Benoit-Swan Pouffer's "Rusty," had a loose narrative of a young dancer, with music from Mikael Karlsson. Spoken phrases accompanied the male soloist as he demonstrated an intricate gestural phrase, the base for the work. With the entrance of the rest of the dancers, the gesture morphed from somewhat casual to almost grotesquely angular, turning antagonistic, then comforting. They swirled and mingled, almost holding each other back, absorbing each other.

The tone changed to a more casual, fun attitude as they began to show each other individualized phrases, as though at a rehearsal session, often ending a set as though tossing a ball. The piece ended with the soloist tossing to the audience.

Amy Hall Garner's "Virtues," set to the heavily synthesized music of Karl Jenkins, was flirty and boisterous. It showcased the individualism of the dancers, especially the solo transitions set during silent moments within an otherwise relentless score, the rhythmic driving heading into a triumphant finale. The troupe is young, all first- or second-year members, and is designed to test promising performers.

Individually, these dancers delivered, with strong solos, confident, intimate pairings and energetic ensemble work. In the ensemble, timing and blocking were constantly inconsistent, with individuals preempting leaps and kicks by nanoseconds and lacking solid unison hits and angles in extended gestures. These somewhat minor missteps added up and drew attention away from the visual impact of the choreographic vision.

Thursday's program will be repeated Saturday evening. Friday's program, to be repeated at Saturday's matinee performance, included Judith Jamison's "Divining," Donald Byrd's "Shards," and the premiere of Malcolm Low's "One Forgotten Moment."