

Review | Alvin Ailey II at the Folly

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Although Alvin Ailey II might be considered the “junior” version of the prominent dance company, selected to showcase its younger, up-and-coming talent, don’t let the name mislead you. The Ailey II company delivers a top-notch performance.

Thursday’s concert at the Folly Theater was tight, crisp and polished, moving quickly from one number to another with impressive effortlessness and efficiency. The first half of the concert featured repertory choreographed by the company’s namesake founder, and then came two new suites which differed dramatically in tone, content, style and genre. The show opened powerfully with “Blues Suite,” featuring an all-male quintet performing to the traditional folk song, “Mean Ol’ Frisco,” which pays homage to the railroad workers of a bygone era. Dressed all in black, the dancers dramatically took the stage, moving together with sinuous grace and power.

Next up was a female trio performing an equally sensual piece set to the smoky tones of “House of the Rising Sun,” using lyrics of the folk-song classic from the female perspective.

Choreographed by Ailey, this suite exemplifies two aspects of his particular talents: The ability to construct male dance movements that are distinctly masculine and his knack for capturing representations of American folk-life in dance and music.

Other Ailey pieces on the program included “The Lark Ascending,” performed by Sarah Daley; “Hidden Rites,” danced by Renaldo Gardner; “Isba,” featuring a fluid duet by Yusaku Komori and Kelly Robotham; and the colorful suite “Escapades,” featuring a steamy duet by Jaqueline Green and Colin Heyward, backed by the entire company.

Ailey’s earthy approach to dance keeps his choreography fresh and timely because of its universal appeal. Rooted in everyday experience, his choreography speaks to the heart, the human condition, and hope, an irresistible combination that resonates with a broad audience. That said, the company demonstrated its great range in the two newer pieces by other choreographers.

“Echoes, a suite by Thang Dao,” a former member of the company, was a classic barefoot modern piece. Its subtle, sublime movements flowed one to another so smoothly that transitions were almost imperceptible. Dressed in gray tanks and draped material, the ensemble often moved like a single organism, rather than as individuals in a group.

The final work, “The Corner,” was a hip-hop-inspired suite combining athletic prowess and creative energy, emphasizing the notion that this young, “second” troupe, has a bright future. It brought the house to its feet in a standing ovation.

Additional performances of Alvin Ailey II are scheduled at the Folly Theater on Friday, Sept. 10, at 8 p.m. and Saturday, Sept. 11, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. For tickets, call 816-931-8993 or go to www.kcfaa.org.