



Thursday, June 11, 2009

## Birthday tribute looks back with love

By LEIGH WITCHEL

**T**HE Alvin Ailey dancers are blowing out the candles on the troupe's 50th birthday cake at BAM this week — the finale to a 50-city tour — and if Tuesday night was any indication, they're not at all fatigued.

The curtain rose on a new production of artistic director Judith Jamison's "Hymn," made in tribute to Ailey four years after he died. Set to music by Robert Ruggieri as well as a spoken score — a collage of reminiscences from company dancers turned into a narrative by Anna Deavere Smith — "Hymn" is filled with turbo-charged group sections in front of a rippling ruby backdrop.

It's a perceptive tribute to Ailey. Yet, for those who don't know his work, seeing it first on a program is like wandering into a memorial

**DANCE REVIEW**

**ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER**

---

*BAM, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn; 718-636-4100. Though Sunday.*

service for someone you never met.

George Faison's "Suite Otis" followed with a good-natured workout for six couples to Otis Redding's songs. A broadly comic duet at the center was danced larger than life by Matthew Rushing and Linda Celeste Sims.

"Suite Otis" isn't deep, but it's smoothly crafted. The women strutted in to Redding's version of "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," and loose-limbed men whacked their heads with their legs as eas-

ily as the rest of us walk down the street.

The evening ended with Ailey's signature gospel masterwork, "Revelations." Be prepared to sing along — much of the audience did. Every number got cheers; "Sinner Man," danced by Jamar Roberts, Clifton Brown and Kirven J. Boyd brought down the house.

The company's high-energy style can be pulverizing, but the dancers are at their best when possessed by their own inspiration. Amos J. Machanic Jr. wasn't dancing a solo in the finale, but I kept watching him endlessly embellish the choreography.

The company is dancing two programs. Ailey fans might opt for this "best of" program; newbies might prefer "Classic Ailey," which samples his work, as an introduction. Both programs close with "Revelations."



Nan Melville

The athletic Alvin Ailey troupe is celebrating 50 years of dance.