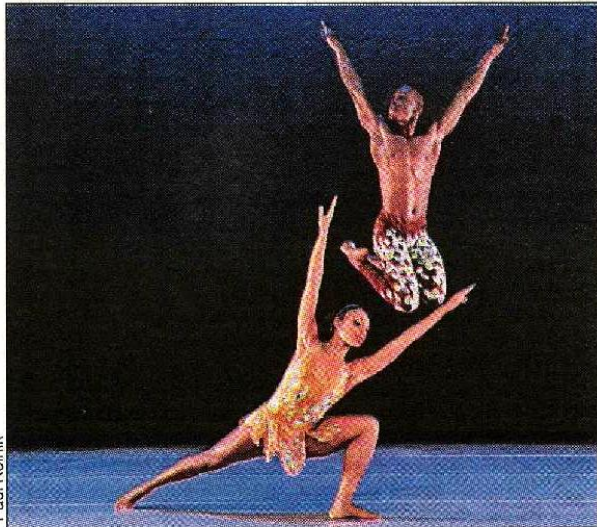


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Battle stations supersized 'Revelations'



Paul Kolnik

The troupe's opening gala got off to a flying start with "Arden Court," featuring Linda Celeste Sims and Kirven J. Boyd.

By LEIGH WITCHEL

WEDNESDAY'S gala opening for the Alvin Ailey company was less revelation than reassurance. Taking over from Judith Jamison, Robert Battle began his first season with an astute new acquisition as well as the company bedrock, "Revelations." From the look of things, Battle's transition will be a smooth one.

The evening began with a company premiere: Paul Taylor's "Arden Court." A classic from 1981, it's the Sara Lee of dance — nobody doesn't like it.

The work is as idyllic as the Shakespeare forest that gave it its name. Set to re-

DANCE REVIEW

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

New York City Center, 131 W.
55th St.; 212-581-1212.
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corded symphonies by the 18th-century English composer William Boyce, the music's counterpoint gives the dancing its form. Dressed in dappled outfits, the dancers buzz around the stage in graceful and skimming quick steps while others walk or lift a leg in grounded and slow motion.

The Ailey cast, six hunky

shirtless men and three (clothed) women, sells it harder than Taylor's own dancers, but that's Ailey's style. They give Taylor's moves the right force and weight — and the work transfers well to them.

Two small bonbons were offered to fill out the evening, a solo by Jamison, "If It's Magic," and "Prelude to a Kiss," a duet by Lar Lubovitch. But despite live music by R&B singer John Legend in the former as well as a leggy, charismatic performance by returning diva Alicia Graf Mack, both pieces were insubstantial.

No such worries about Ailey's classic "Revelations." Performed with live music and a gospel chorus,

this was a supersized version, expanded from the usual 18 dancers to 50, including six of the Ailey school's youngest students.

As always, the electrifying "Sinner Man" trio brought the house down. In the final number, additional dancers filed down all the aisles of the theater on all levels doing the same steps as onstage — it was like an IMAX performance, without the 3-D glasses.

Even supersized, the company dances "Revelations" as it always does — with as much spontaneity and enthusiasm as if this were the very first time. And that's something no one should ever change.