

December 27, 2012

# Alvin Ailey brings the funk

## DANCE REVIEW

### ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

New York City Center, 131 W.  
55th St.; 212-581-1212.  
Through Sunday.

By LEIGH WITCHEL

**V**ARIETY is the spice of Ailey. As artistic director Robert Battle winds up his second season, he continues to broaden the repertory — making for programming where the choreography is (almost) as good as the dancing.

Last year's import was Paul Taylor's masterpiece, "Arden Court." This year it's Czech choreographer Jiri Kylián's "Petite Mort," made in 1990 for his company, Netherlands Dance Theater. If you saw the reality series "Breaking Pointe," you saw bits of it.

"Petite Mort" — Little Death — is a euphemism for an orgasm, and Kylián's work for six couples is sen-

suous, if a trifle reserved.

The curtain opens with the Freudian tableau of men balancing fencing swords on their fingers. With the women clad in flesh-colored leotards and the men in high-waisted briefs, a lot of skin is on display. The group breaks into couples, but even as the women wind and drape across their partners to the (recorded) Mozart accompaniment, the intimacy stays cool.

There are a few design tricks — the women have enormous black dresses that turn out to stand on their own, and a huge black silk helps change the scenes. "Petite Mort" lets the dancers show off another side of their technique and expands the troupe's range without losing its identity.

That identity is encapsulated in the perennial finale, "Revelations." The audience clapped along the moment they heard "Rocka My Soul." Somehow the dancers make Ailey's signature work seem fresh every time. Let your eyes travel up a line of dancers and watch how they all



Paul Kolnik

Ailey's dancers performing in Ronald Brown's "Grace" — a spiritual and physical hybrid of gospel, house and African jazz.

do a step the same way — but different.

Ronald Brown's massive, sprawling "Grace," made for Ailey in '99, was brought back this season in a new production. The music and the dancing is a mix of gos-

pel, house and African jazz. Brown's objective is spiritual but in a very physical way: It's an urban, updated "Revelations."

The red and white costumes divide the cast in two squadrons. Alicia Graf

Mack, tall and thin in diaphanous white, appears standing at the back to start, like a pale skyscraper. All the dancers groove through it in a way that's both natural yet extraordinary. They're angels, or at

least more than human.

Crouching low, gesticulating and springing up, they're in a nonstop funk ecstasy. In "Grace," you sweat your way to God — and bring the audience with you.