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A Texas Barrelhouse, And the Morning After

On Wednesday night at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater unleashed some real choreography. It was, blessedly, an all-Ailey program with two important bookends: “Blues Suite,” from 1958, and “Revelations,” his 1960 masterpiece. They remain two of Ailey’s finest works; shown on the same evening, they also revealed, some 50 years after their creation, a clear choreographic progression.

DANCE REVIEW

GIA
KOURLAS

In a sense the dances sum up a weekend in the South. Saturday night in a rowdy barrelhouse in “Blues Suite,” based on people Ailey observed during his childhood in Texas, becomes Sunday morning at church in “Revelations.” The evocative triangle formation of dancers seen near the end of “Blues Suite,” returns, with a starker emphasis, in the moving opening scene of “Revelations.”

“Blues Suite” opens a window into a world of pleasure tinged with despair; here the Ailey dancers take characterization just as seriously as steps. With music performed by Kenny Brawner and the Brawner Brothers — the group appeared onstage with the dancers — the work was instilled with a special vibrancy as it progressed from “Backwater Blues,” a teasing duet for Glenn Allen Sims and Renee Robinson who fought a fierce battle of sexual tension, to “Sham,” which featured Matthew Rushing and Yusha-Maria Sorzano (especially

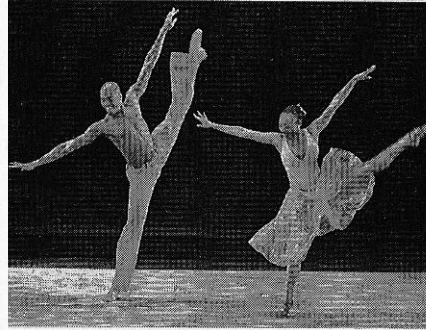
The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will perform through Sunday at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Avenue, at Ashland Place, Fort Greene; (718) 636-4100 or bam.org

hilarious) as a pair of misguided lovers.

The program’s middle chunk, a compilation of “Anniversary Highlights,” showcased a seamless array of excerpts from “Phases” (1980), “Landscape” (1981), “For ‘Bird’ — With Love” (1984), “Caverna Magica” (1986) and “Opus McShann” (1988). The one that left you wanting more, as much for the choreography as its dancers, was “Phases,” set to “Flight Time” by L. Mizell (recorded by Donald Byrd).

As women swirled past in colorful skirts, three men, Antonio Douthit, Yannick Lebrun and Kirven J. Boyd, faced the audience, inching back and forth as they gently shook their hips and fluttered their hands. The remarkable Mr. Douthit, whose carriage and fluid power bloomed with a joyful exuberance, gave the jazzy “Phases” its earthy, sensual pulse. He only appeared once on Wednesday night, but part of the pleasure of the Ailey season at the Brooklyn Academy is the extensive cast changes. Everyone, it seems, gets a chance at a meaty role; on Saturday afternoon Mr. Douthit is to perform the poignant “I Wanna Be Ready” solo from “Revelations.”

Equally spellbinding is Mr. Lebrun, who joined the company in 2008 and whose natural line and extension constantly draws the eye. He was a vision throughout the program, not only in “Phases,” but also in the “Mean Ol’ Frisco” section of “Blues Suite,” as the Tenor Sax in “For ‘Bird’ — With Love” and in the dazzling “Sinner Man” trio of “Revelations.” Like Mr. Douthit, Mr. Lebrun doesn’t merely dance the steps, he sings with his body, and the music it makes keeps you wanting more.



Alvin Ailey American
Dance Theater

Antonio Douthit and Rosalyn Deshauteurs in “Phases” at the BAM Howard Gilman Opera House on Wednesday.