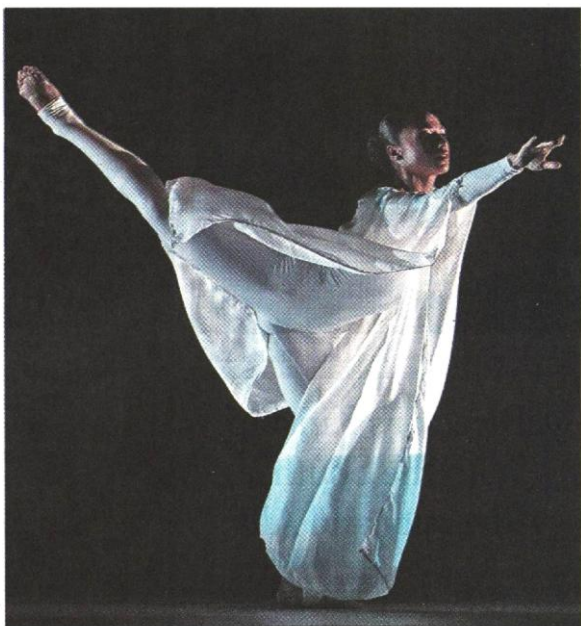


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Destination Unknown, but a Quest Pushes Gentle Motion to the Fore



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Linda Celeste Sims in "Journey," by Joyce Trisler, at City Center.

A woman in white is roaming, searching. Slowly her movements fill each of the long, unusual, quiet chords of "The Unanswered Question," by Charles

ALASTAIR MACAULAY

DANCE REVIEW

Ives. Now she advances through space; now, staying on the spot, stretching her upper body, she arches her neck up to face the sky.

There's a sense that she does not know what she is seeking, but that she cannot stop her quest. It does not, however, agonize her: her motion has gentleness, and a strange mixture of restraint and luxuriance.

This solo is "Journey," by the choreographer Joyce Trisler, who died in 1979. At City Center on Tuesday it returned to the repertory of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater after an absence of 20 years. Ms. Trisler was dear to Ailey, who dedicated his "Memoria" to her. Her own dance company continued into the 1980s; today, however, her work is rarely seen onstage. It's impressive, therefore, that Robert Battle, the new artistic director of the Ailey company, has added "Journey," created in 1958, to his company's stock. We expect new directors to add the modern and the famously historic; we don't expect them to show an instinct for the could-so-easily-have-been-forgotten work from yesteryear.

The woman of "Journey," performed on Tuesday by Linda Celeste Sims, wears a two-tier all-white costume. Her feet, hands and head are bare; her legs and arms are covered by a tight costume, while a large, loose dress covers her torso. Two particular images stay in the mind. In one, Ms. Sims — on straight parted legs and with her arms opening wide — bends her head back and keeps turning her neck in an arc, her gaze moving across the sky. The body plainly, openly asks the question; the head maintains the search.

In the other, she stretches a leg behind her in an arabesque that finds its resolution in the gaze of her upturned face. Her supporting leg, bended at the knee, leans forward, forming another arc that likewise leads to the upturned head. The torso is angled

to expose the neck and shoulders, the arms held in a down-facing curve. The connections between the body's three main lines make a ravishing interplay — though the way in which the arms do not participate in the sense of journey has an elegiac sense, a note of resignation.

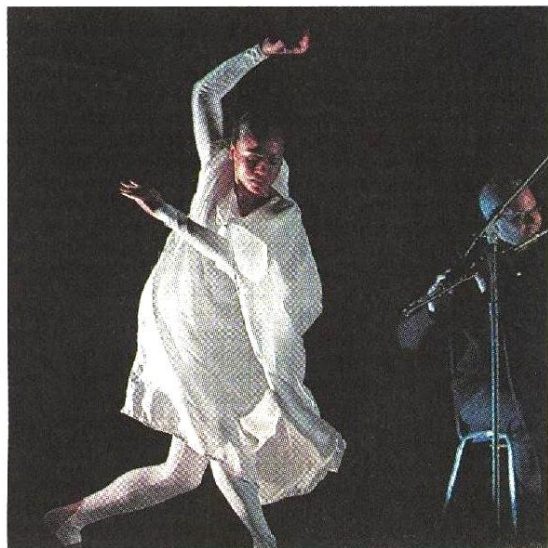
The four-instrument Ives music was played live, with flute (Christopher Johnson), violin (Christina Courtin) and cello (Alex Greenbaum) onstage and the isolated trumpet (Joshua Frank) up in the Grand Tier: the dissonances and tensions of sonority in its chords are extraordinary. Ms. Sims, eloquently — even voluptuously — revealed the choreography's beauties of shape and current. "Journey" is not quite a drama; it has a curiously muted quality that comes together in your head more clearly after the curtain has dropped.

Three other more familiar works were also seen on Tuesday. Ailey's own "Night Creature" (1974), to Duke Ellington music, is particularly well known. It fluently covers a spectrum of dance idioms: jazz arm gestures, Cuban hip motion and the intricate petite batterie of ballet jumps are just three of the most unmistakable. Judith Jamison's "Love Stories," choreographed in 2004 with Mr. Battle and Rennie Harris, amounts to little in terms of choreographic structure, but it's an audience hit simply be-

cause of its rush of appealing dance opportunities and, again, its range of dance styles (Mr. Harris adds hip-hop to the mix), impressively delivered.

In "The Prodigal Prince" (1968), Geoffrey Holder shows his gift for rich visual pageantry in creating a spiritual biography of the Haitian painter Hector Hyppolite, shaped by Christian and, especially, voodoo elements. The variety of bold costume colors, the Haitian dance vitality and the sense of personal adventure all exert real force; you follow it as an adventure.

It's impressive to watch the Ailey dancers in this first season under Mr. Battle. The indefatigable Renee Robinson, in "Night Creature" and "Prodigal Prince," is as vivid as ever. Kirven James Boyd and Briana Reed (in "Prodigal"), Marcus Jarrell Willis ("Love Stories") and others all exhibit the luxurious physical texture and personal intensity associated with the Ailey company. But Clifton Brown, as the "Prodigal" St. John the Baptist, is dancing with a new kind of beauty. This technical powerhouse now casts a soft glow that suggests a fresh layer of composure. Under Mr. Battle's predecessor, Ms. Jamison, the company's worst fault was a tendency to oversell in terms of facial delivery. This, under Mr. Battle, seems to be ebbing away.



Ms. Sims and Christopher Johnson, who played a Charles Ives piece to accompany "Journey."

The season continues through Jan. 1 at City Center, 131 West 55th Street, Manhattan; (212) 581-1212, nycitycenter.org.