

SATURDAY, MAY 28, 2011

## A Tribute to the Past, Visions of the Future

When a school is a training ground for a company, its performances offer an interesting opportunity to see the way technique and performance styles are

forged. On Wednesday night the Alvin Ailey School presented its Spring Celebration Concert at the Ailey Citigroup Theater, and the senior students who

took pride of place were remarkable for the ardent sincerity of their demeanor as well as the excellence of their dancing.

First came sections from Robert Battle's "Channels," a lyrical, fast-flowing dance that set a solo woman (Anne O'Donnell) amid shifting, geometrical group formations. With the dancers in blue-green tunics, or tops over leggings, the piece has a slightly Grecian air, intensified by circling groups and profiled stances, evoking images on a Greek vase. The music, however, is Brahms — two lieder and the Allegro movement from the "String Quartet No. 1 in C minor" — and Ms. O'Donnell particularly responded to its lush amplitude with expansive ardor.

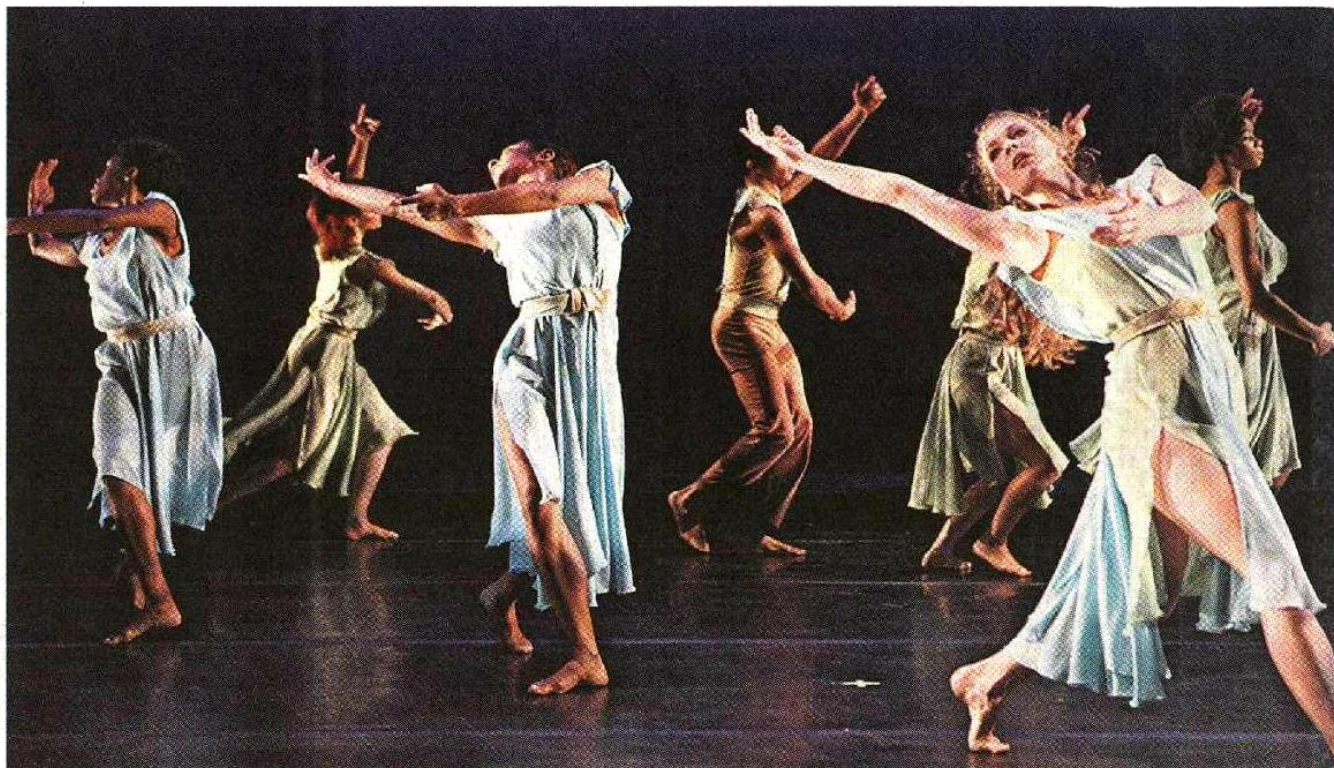
"Channels" can look a little busy; the dancers seem to rush on and off incessantly. But Mr. Battle, who takes over from Ju-

dith Jamison as the artistic director of the Ailey company in July, is a skillful dance maker who knows how to keep the eye engaged and surprised. It would be good to see the full piece.

It would also be good to see the whole of Joyce Trisler's "Four Temperaments," set to that Hindemith score famously used by Balanchine. There are hints of the Balanchine work in this version, which also costumes its dancers in severe leotard-and-tights outfits, and sometimes quotes it with balletic intent.

Ms. Trisler, an Ailey company member who died in 1979, was an exponent of the Lester Horton technique, and her "Temperaments" showed its principles in its long lunges, often hinging from the pelvis; its flat-backed dips and bends; and its smooth, muscular transitions from floor to upright positions and to high lifts. The school offered only the opening section, not enough to get a sense of the work, but enough to appreciate the clarity and energy of the four couples representing the humors, or temperaments, of the title — Melancholic, Sanguine, Phlegmatic and Choleric.

After the piece, tribute was paid and the Apex award for teaching bestowed upon the



JULIETA CERVANTES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Alvin Ailey School Anne O'Donnell, far right, and other students performed parts of Robert Battle's "Channels" at the Ailey Citigroup Theater.

school's resident Horton expert, Ana Marie Forsythe, who trained under Ms. Trisler and has taught at the school since 1973. Ms. Forsythe, who made a touching speech, paid homage to Denise Jefferson, the longtime director of the Ailey School, who died last year.

A new work, "inspiration\expiration," by the choreographer Scott Rink, was set to a heavy-breathing (and occasionally jazzy) score by Eva Cassidy and Matmos. The work retained a balletic impulse in its big, wheeling jumps and high extensions, showing the 12 dancers' impres-

sive technical skills (most looked ready for professional careers) and provided a nice vehicle for Azza Bashir, an enigmatic central figure in the work. Ms. Bashir isn't a perfect technician and there is a slight awkwardness to her dancing, but she projects a compelling intensity that makes

it hard to take your eyes off her.

A taste of "Revelations" came last, with the final sections of that work danced by Ailey II members, some of whom will join the main company next season. Their enthusiasm and joy onstage made their imminent arrival look like a very good thing.