

In Two Nights of Mixed Choreography, a Dancer's Star Remains a Constant

In 1962, Alvin Ailey choreographed "Reflections in D" to Duke Ellington's music as a vehicle for himself. At only three minutes, it was meant as a transition dance, allowing time for other dances to change their costumes between pieces. But innocent tasks can produce enlightening work.

GIA KOURLAS
REVIEW
Clifton Brown, making his debut in the solo on Wednesday night at City Center, dived inside the music, providing voluminous breadth to his curving arms as he moved from one grounded position to the next.

Making something so rigorous look easy — and Mr. Brown does, with liquid plasticity — is no small achievement, though in many ways it's just a part of what makes Aliley's first, inherently theatrical choreography so significant. On Thursday night there were no Aliley dances on the program, and the absence was sorely felt. On Friday, Tharay's "Gold Section" kicked in, giving the dancers (including the daring Khyla Douglass) something meaningful to sink their feet into.

The same program, which included Carmen A. Bracho's endlessly peppy "Groove to Nobody's Business" and Talley Beatty's strange — though not in

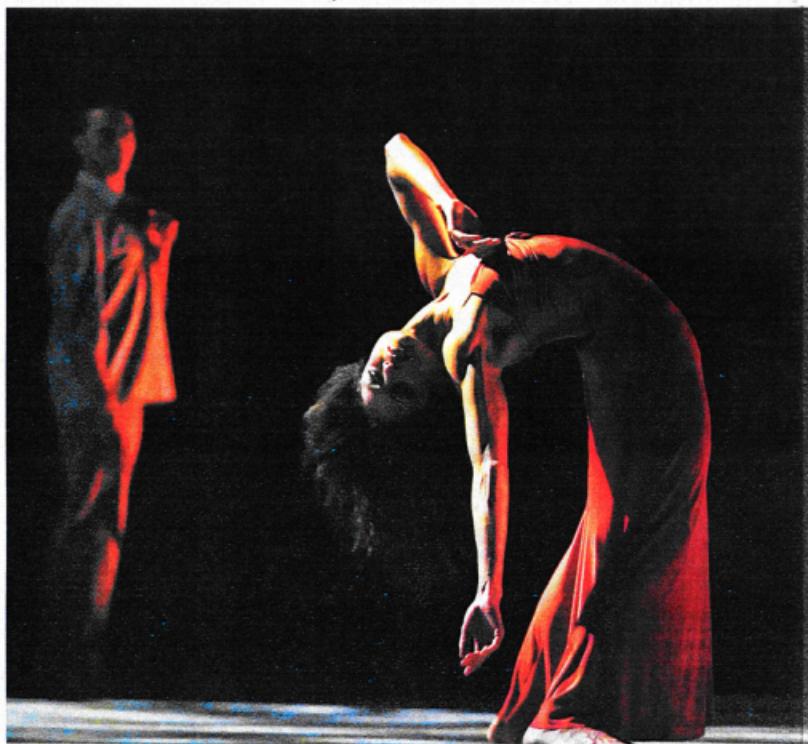
A versatile Alvin Ailey dancer sustains her trajectory.

a fascinating way — "Road of the Phoebe Snow," also featured the company premiere of Robert Battle's "Unfold," a 2005 duet set to an aria sung by Leontyne Price in Verdi's bel canto masterpiece "Louise."

Linda Celeste Sims, a dancer of spellbinding authority and flexibility, arches in an unspotted backbend. Like a weeping willow, her hair and arms grace the hem of her long orange dress; she remains still until Mr. Brown, standing in the shadows, slowly approaches.

In the program notes, the choreographer refers to the duet as "a look at first love, yet it seems strangely somber." The dancers continue Mr. Battle's penchant for arching and spiraling shapes that morph from one anguished

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performs through Dec. 31 at City Center, 131 West 55th Street, Manhattan; (212) 582-3212, aliley.org.



Clifton Brown and Linda Celeste Sims of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Robert Battle's "Unfold," set to a Leontyne Price aria from the opera "Louise."

image to the next; when Mr. Brown walks over Ms. Sims's body, she grabs one of his legs until he crumbles, then crawls across his body as if it's a corpse. Like "Reflections in D," "Unfold" is over before you know it, but this time such brevity doesn't equal an act of purity. Instead, "Unfold" is perplexingly slight.

Ms. Sims, one of the company's most prized members, is a commanding, irreverent personality. Despite her small stature, she possesses the stage, as she proved on Wednesday in Aliley's "Memoria" and Elisa Morris's "Treadings" opposite Matthew Rushing, and on Thursday in Ms. Rashig's "Golden Section."

Making her debut in "Memoria," her body rippled from shape to shape, holding balances and tilts with aplomb; few dancers

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anywhere have such control, at once vibrant — she never stiffens into a shape — and purposeful. Aliley dedicated "Memoria," a

luminous 1979 dance, to his friend Joyce Trister, an organism states, for her joy, beauty, creativity and "wild spirit." He could just as easily have been describing the incandescent dancing of Ms. Sims. This season, she is a revelation.