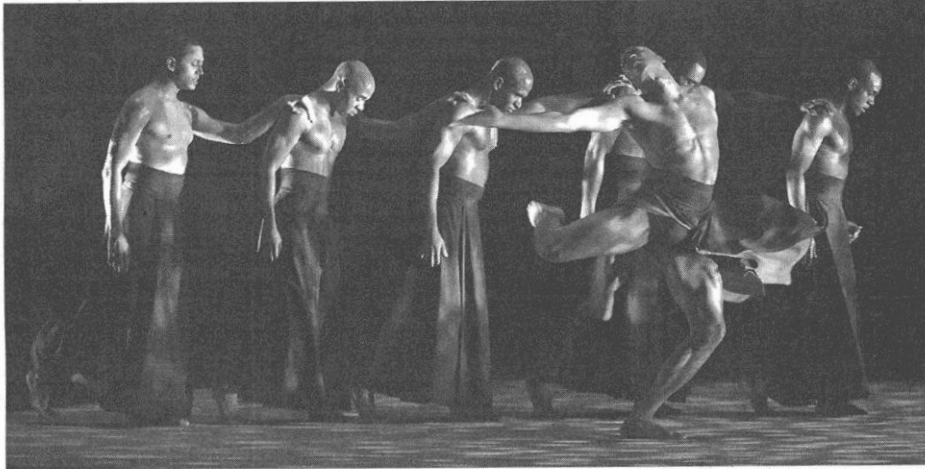


DECEMBER 3, 2010



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Antonio Douthit, foreground, at City Center on Wednesday.

## Night of Tributes and Performance, Too

Alvin Ailey died 21 years ago, on Dec. 1, the very date that his namesake company opened its annual season at City Center this year. He would surely have been

**ROSLYN  
SULCAS**

**DANCE  
REVIEW**

astounded and delighted to see the by-now ritualized Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater opening night: the red carpet, the photographers, the stars, the speeches, the money.

Much of that glamorous profile is due to Judith Jamison, who has run the company since Ailey's death and who will retire next year, handing the reins to Robert Battle. But the company would not be financially where it is today without Joan Weill, who has been chairwoman of the board for the past 10 years. Ms. Weill and her husband, the financier Sanford I. Weill, have given more than \$30 million to the company and were instrumental in building the organization's spacious Midtown Manhattan headquarters, which opened in 2005.

The first part of Wednesday night's gala was devoted to paying tribute to Ms. Weill, and it was almost as long as the dances that followed. First came the gala chairman and committee, announcing that the evening had raised \$2.7 million. Ms. Jamison materialized, resplendent in a brightly patterned tunic ("I decided to go ethnic tonight"), followed by Mr. Weill and the Weills' daughter, Jessica Bibliowicz, each offering their homages.

Then came a film about Ms. Weill and eventually Ms. Weill herself, looking uncharacteristically speechless. (Although she

*Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's season runs through Jan. 2 at City Center, 131 West 55th Street, Manhattan; (212) 581-1212, nycitycenter.org.*

wasn't.) And then the "Good Morning America" anchor Robin Roberts introduced the first two works on the program: Mr. Battle's "Hunt" and Ailey's "Cry."

You will have noticed that it is almost midway through this review, and I have only just mentioned actual dance works. This, dear reader, is a faithful attempt to replicate the experience of being at a gala.

But onward. "The Hunt" was created in 2001 with Mr. Battle's company, and it's a fine choice for the virtuosic, athletic energies of the Ailey men as well as an appropriate acknowledgment of his new presence. The piece sets six

### An effusive gala before a changing of the guard.

of the company's best dancers — Clifton Brown, Antonio Douthit, Kirven James Boyd, Matthew Rushing, Glenn Allen Sims, Jamar Roberts — in an aural universe of pounding, elemental percussive rhythms and cries. (The music is by Les Tambours du Bronx.)

The men, clad in long black skirts, their chests bare, move with martial swirls of arcing legs and slicing arms, from sharp diagonal lines into crouching, swerving pairs or ritualized turning circles. At times as they leap in and out of one another's paths, feinting and arrowing their arms, they look like tribal warriors engaged in ancient rites. At other moments they could be an urban gang, jostling for power and status, alliances and hostilities seething and ready to break.

And then there are interludes, as the dancers move dreamily in tight circles, arms wreathing overhead, when they could be Zen monks or high priests. Mr. Battle moves skillfully between these images, keeping alive our interest in the men even as the music pounds on with relentless intensity. (The imaginative, ever-changing lighting by Burke Wilmore contributes, too.) Most impressive, though, is the brutal physicality of the dancing and the way these men both find its nuances and give their all.

A similar virtuosity is needed for "Cry," a 1971 solo by Ailey that confirmed Ms. Jamison as the company's great star. The work is in three sections, moving from evocations of drudgery and emotional devastation to exaltation, and is a tour-de-force vehicle for its performer. On Wednesday, however, each part was taken by a different dancer, lessening its cumulative impact despite fine, ardent work from Constance Stamatou, Briana Reed and, in particular, Linda Celeste Sims.

Finally, naturally, there was "Revelations," although not before a few more speeches (one by Mr. Battle that indicated he might match Ms. Jamison for charisma and easy ad-lib) and an informative, poignant film by Judy Kinberg to celebrate the 50th anniversary of that work.

"Revelations" was performed, unusually, with Sweet Honey in the Rock's musicians and singers onstage. The live sound was both wonderful and oddly distracting when it differed (as it frequently did) from the usual recorded score, and the musicians' presence provided visual and virtuosic competition for the dancers. But "Revelations" can stand anything, really, and it was danced with heartwarming passion. The audience, rightly, cheered.