

Alvin Ailey Dancers Open U.S. Festival in Moscow

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By Alissa de Carbonnel



Dancers of the Alvin Ailey dance company perform during a press show at the Stanislavsky Music Theater in Moscow. Credit: Reuters/Segei Karpukhin

MOSCOW (Reuters) - The Alvin Ailey dance company, with its roots in the U.S. civil rights movement, opened the American Seasons festival in Moscow this week, electrifying audiences with a 50-year anniversary performance of its seminal, emotionally charged ballet "Revelations."

After a six-year absence in Russia, the contemporary troupe stayed true to its reputation that an "Ailey dancer does it all" rousing the audience with a range of jazz, classical and street to the soulful vocals of Nina Simone and the Duke Ellington orchestra's exuberant compositions.

But it was the stirring gospel and powerful story-telling of "Revelations" -- reaching arms and splayed hands evoking grief, determination, hope and redemption -- that set the Stanislavsky Music Theater clapping in chorus.

"When I think of 'Revelations', it speaks a lot to some of our struggles in our own country with racism and discrimination and how we overcame it because of our great faith: That is a story that needs to be told," Ailey's newly appointed artistic director Robert Battle told Reuters.

"I think sometimes you learn more about each other through the arts than you do through the history books," said Battle, who is taking over from Judith Jameson as the company's third artistic director since its creation in 1958.

"Dancing breaks down barriers that is why it is so wonderful to travel to some place like Moscow."

Since its debut in New York city in 1960, more people have seen "Revelations" than any other modern dance piece. Ahead of the Russian performance on Wednesday the Ailey company aired a brief documentary on the inspiration for the piece: Drawn from Ailey's memories of an impoverished childhood in the segregated and church-going world of small town Texas.

First as a dancer with the Lester Horton Dance Company and then as a choreographer of 79 ballets infused with what he called "blood memories" from his troubled youth, Ailey became a hero to a whole generation of black modern dancers. In 1988 he won the Kennedy Center Honor for Lifetime Contribution to American Culture and died a year later in December at the age of 58.



The Ailey troupe's Moscow performance not only launched a year of U.S. cultural events in Russia but the reopening of the Moscow Dance Inversions contemporary performance festival, including shows from France, Poland, Spain and the Netherlands this year, after a three year pause.
(Editing by Paul Casciato)