



ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Jamison's farewell tour signals her pass of the baton

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The air was filled with anticipation last Saturday afternoon as the near-capacity audience filed into the Academy of Music for the first of three weekend performances by the world-renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT).

The company's recent appearance in Philadelphia was essentially part of an unofficial "farewell tour" by hometown girl Judith Jamison, who ends her 22-year tenure as the company's artistic director on July 1. She will be replaced by Artistic Director Designate Robert Battle, an accomplished 37-year-old Florida native.

The diverse program began with "Anointed," by Christopher L. Huggins, a name that is quite familiar to patrons of the Philadelphia Dance Company, also known as Philadanco. Completely devoid of melody and highlighting AADT's impeccable precision, this piece featured angular positions, effortless lifts and brilliant partnering, and any given moment in the piece could have been a gorgeous still photograph.

After a brief intermission, Rachael McLaren presented the sassy solo "The Evolution of a Secured Feminine" by Camille A. Brown. This non-stop number featured the voices of Ella Fitzgerald and Bettye Carter, but the most compelling moment came when McLaren, draped across a chair at center stage and full of attitude, interpreted the Nancy Wilson classic, "Guess Who I Saw Today?" Beautiful and elegant work by a brilliantly trained dancer/actress.

Of the newer works, my favorite was "The Hunt," choreographed by Jamison's successor, Robert Battle. A primal piece showcasing the power and passion of the breathtaking (and bare-chested) men in the company, this aerobic marathon set to a pulsating and unrelenting drumbeat literally simulated the pursuit, capture and carnage of the hunter and his prey. The captivating costumes by Mia McSwain, which were basically black satin skirts lined in bright red, symbolized the bloodshed of the ultimate kill. If this riveting piece by Battle is any indication, the company is being left in capable hands.

After second intermission, the moment finally arrived, but before the company took the stage to perform their signature work "Revelations," there was a short film on the history of the piece titled "Celebrating Revelations at 50," featuring comments by Alvin Ailey and Judith Jamison.

Inspired by the Black experience in America and beyond, this masterpiece, though not a major technical challenge for this supremely talented company, personifies Ailey's passion for his art and commitment to his people. Set to Negro spirituals including "I Been Buked," "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," "Fix Me Jesus," "Honor, Honor" and "Wade in the Water" to name a few, and choreographed exclusively by Ailey, this unforgettable piece of Americana ranges from exuberance to despair, and ends on a high note with the entire company cavoring to a joyous rendition of "Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham."



While it may sound a bit dramatic, any African American, or any person of color for that matter, should add a live performance of this Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's "Revelations" to his or her "Bucket List." This

proud and prolific company is truly a national treasure. Contact Entertainment Reporter Kimberly C. Roberts at (215) 893-5753 or at kr Roberts@phillytrib.com.