

Passion and panache

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Review by Vejay Steede

Ailey II opened their two-night Bermuda Festival run with a delightful programme of brilliantly choreographed and tightly executed modern dance masterpieces. The young performers who comprised the cast exhibited abundant technical excellence and rich reserves of energy throughout the performance.

The programme itself was quite well paced, providing ample opportunity to savour the art on display, and packing quite a punch into the pieces presented. The first piece was a mesmerising symphony of movement and shadow.

Aptly entitled 'Echoes', and choreographed by Thang Dao, the piece featured flawless symmetry, seamless transitions, and impressive athleticism. 'Echoes' was a full company piece that found all the dancers clad in grey and delivering a clinically effective feast of technique and form. This was a performance that was quite impossible to turn away from, and a thoroughly captivating way to start a world class dance show. 'Echoes' was followed by the first intermission of the evening, a skilfully placed moment of reflection and breath that gave the evening a touch of depth and anticipation.

The second act of the show featured two pieces and a pause. 'Splendid Isolation II' found dancer Fana Tesfagiorgis commanding the stage in a simply divine white gown that literally covered half the stage. The piece was a stationary study of movement and method, and Miss Tesfagiorgis delivered Jessica Lang's subtle choreography with vigour and grace.

Following a short pause, the male cast members graced the stage clad in traditional samurai warrior skirts (black with red trim); ready for 'The Hunt.' Robert Battle's high octane choreography drew oohs and aahs from the capacity crowd, adding ample action and intrigue to the evening. 'The Hunt' was all strength, speed and power; an impressive display of acrobatics and athleticism coupled with skill and verve to burn. Stylish, energetic, and ferocious, 'The Hunt' brought muscle to the dance and showed exactly how to use it.

A second intermission was next. Another perfectly positioned moment of reflection that allowed the power and grace of the previous act to sink in and be that much more appreciated.

The evening's final act was a magical melding of colour and control. 'Shards' was a full company piece that featured flashes of royal blue gliding in perfect symmetry across the stage. Couples merged into mobs and shattered into pairs again at will as they delivered Donald Byrd's sublime choreography. 'Shards' teemed with smooth transitions and transcendent synchronicity; a tapestry of technique and sensuality.

The show finished at around 10pm, making it a wonderfully efficient and splendidly executed piece of high art. It was perhaps the most perfectly paced two hours I have ever spent in the Ruth Seaton James Centre for Performing Arts. The art on display was delivered with considerable passion and panache, and the pacing of the entire production added an element of expectancy and reflection rare in live shows.

This was a case when less was most certainly more; brisk periods of stunning art and breathtaking technique followed by refreshing periods of discussion, analysis, and thought.

It was an experience that was attentively designed, and very nicely executed.



Commanding presence: Ailey II's Fana Tesfagiorgis