



Paul Kolnik

Dancer Briana Reed performs "Cry" with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Berkley.

DANCE REVIEW A thrilling start to Ailey shows

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Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, past and future, irradiated the stage of Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall on Tuesday evening when the company launched its annual

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Cal Performances residency, a relationship that stretches back over four decades and gives no sign of ending, despite a change in artistic leadership next season. Tuesday's jubilant audience had matters on its mind other than succession, namely, the spectacular dancing that thrills you to your marrow.

This first of three programs proposed a historical survey. The time span between Ailey's "Revelations" and Christopher L. Huggins' "Anointed" is an exact 50 years. The stops in between included Robert Battle's testosterone-laden "The Hunt" and Ailey's exquisite "Cry," which was danced here by three women, rather than the traditional one. At the 1971 premiere, she was current Artistic Director Judith Jamison, and that performance vouchsafed a dazzling career.

Since Battle assumes the artistic leadership next year, "The Hunt" offered a preview

of the choreographic future.

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and it is promising. Although the piece dates from 2001, Battle exhibits a talent for transcending or, at least, personalizing formula. The six men, bare-chested and in flowing skirts, might have been consigned to delivering macho routines. But Battle conjures a secret society, not without hints of homoeroticism, which plays by its own stylized rules.

"The Hunt" comes with a pounding recorded percussion score by the delectably named Tambours du Bronx. They lay down an intricate metrical scheme to which Battle's dancers respond with remarkable alacrity. The men fall into dominance-submission gambits, assemble for skirt-furling unisons and at one point, pair off for a sweeping crossed-arm number that recalls

nothing so much as Frederick Ashton's "Les Patineurs." The thrills are undeniable; the sextet, led by the redoubtable Clifton Brown, wanted nothing in potency or precision.

Still, this was an evening to marvel at Ailey's gift for focusing his dance-making art in economical but telling gestures. For all its mixture of voluptuousness and austerity, "Cry," dedicated "To all Black women everywhere," doesn't waste a single moment in its settings to music by Alice Coltrane, Laura Nyro and Chuck Griffin. It's remarkable how a single image — splayed fingers crowning a jutting arm — can communicate so much in context.

Rachael McLaren (in Christina Giannini's white, bare-backed gown) suggests confidence in her strutting, swirling trajectory. Constance Stama-



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Clifton Brown (left) and Antonio Duothit in "The Hunt," by Robert Battle, Alvin Ailey's next artistic director.

tiou's contractions, swinging arms, knee bends and deep arabesques indicate vulnerability. Briana Reed's formidable

back and her little kicks propose a triumphant finale; she, indeed, is moving on. All three performers justify the revival of this

landmark essay.

There are no more significant landmarks than "Revelations." The company is celebrating the work's 50th anniversary with a short but touching film by Judy Kinberg and an eloquent performance of what must be the most popular dance in the world. The current troupe proves masterful in communicating the strength of conviction Ailey found in the black church in the South.

"Anointed" left a less distinctive impression. The ardent lifts and buoyant unisons seemed almost generic, the synthesized, heavy-breathing score communicated little, and it was left to the color-coded costumes to express the emotional shifts one should have found in the choreography. Linda Celeste Sims and Jamar Roberts emerged with their glowing gifts intact.

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