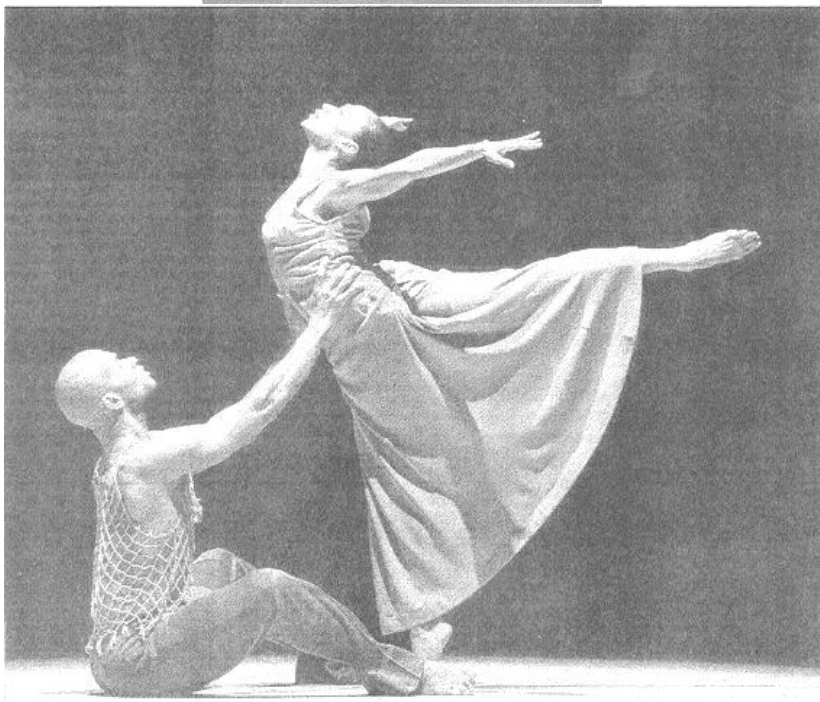




Husband and wife shine as Alvin Ailey American Dance comes to NJPAC. Page 29

SPOTLIGHT



Linda Celeste Sims dances with her husband, Glenn Allen Sims, in Alvin Ailey's "Revelations."

A step beyond

Sims is an all-star in the star-filled pantheon of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is justly known as a company of all-stars. When the troupe returns to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center next weekend, performing beloved, modern classics such as Alvin Ailey's "Revelations" and Paul Taylor's "Arden Court," it will fill the stage with spectacular movers, each endowed with a distinct and compelling personality.

Yet even among this abundance of talent, some individuals are special. One of the most admired artists in the troupe today is Linda Celeste Sims (Linda Cáceres, before her marriage), who joined Ailey in 1996 after a stint with Ballet Hispánico. She was only 19 then, and remembering the audition, Sims chuckles at her own innocence.

Sims' roommate had dragged her out of bed, shaking her awake and pushing her to take the long ride down from the Bronx. "She said, 'The Ailey audition is happening, and I don't care if you have to go to work, you're coming with me.'" Sims

ON DANCE
Robert Johnson



recalls. During the tryouts, the dancer says she wasn't nervous because it never occurred to her that she might be the only woman chosen from among 100 dancers in the studio that day. "It wasn't until the last cut, when I looked around and there were only 10 of us. That's when it clicked," she says. One frenzied month later, Sims made her first international tour with the Ailey company, visiting Egypt, Israel, France and Germany.

Since then, her career with Ailey has given her multiple opportunities, and Sims has proven her versatility in a wide-ranging repertoire. Hard-edged and cool in a piece like Ulysses Dove's "Bad Blood," the dancer spills over with emotion as the vulnerable, drug-addled heroine of Ailey's

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Where: Prudential Hall, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center St., Newark

When: Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m.

How much: \$25 to \$90. Call (866) 466-5722 or visit njpac.org.

"Flowers." Yet Sims is especially known for her lyricism, which takes her performance to a calm, spiritual plane in works such as Ailey's "Memoria" and in his masterpiece, "Revelations."

Sims credits her musicality to the time she put in studying flamenco, at Ballet Hispánico, and she acknowledges her private coach, Gabriella Darvash, an "old-school" teacher who taught her to eliminate stress and affectations from her dancing.

Life experience has added to the richness of Sims' artistry. She

especially enjoys dancing with her husband, Glenn Allen Sims, who joined the company a year after she did. Their relationship sparked one night on tour, at a club in Zurich, where the young man demonstrated his prowess as a salsa dancer. "When he started dancing, I was like, 'Yes! He dances like a Latin man. He can groove to my music, my blood!' We just lit it off, after that," she says.

Their real-life romance has been a hit on stage in the rapturous, central duet from David Parsons' "Shining Star," and Sims says that 90 percent of the time, she gets to dance "Fix Me, Jesus," with her husband. "It's full, complete trust," she says, describing this piece from "Revelations," which features tricky balances and supported back-bends as the woman character dances with an "unseen" spiritual partner. "It doesn't matter how I feel that day," Sims says. "I can just close my eyes and fall back, and I know he'll catch me."

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