

# The Star-Ledger

## 'Arden Court,' a modern classic, enters the Ailey repertoire

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By Robert Johnson

**NEW YORK**—Choreographer Paul Taylor, whose fabulous “Arden Court” entered the repertoire of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater on opening night, Wednesday, is a national treasure. Notes in the New York City Center program claim he is the last survivor of the “pantheon” who invented modern dance.

Taylor certainly is getting on in years, but do we need to hammer RIP over the grave of modern dance? (Last one out of the pantheon, turn out the lights!) Far more helpful is imagining Taylor with the late Alvin Ailey as young men standing together at the forefront of a new era—at the beginning of something, not the end.

Ailey and Taylor were visionaries born only a year apart. Both founded their dance companies in the 1950s, when modern dance was already well-established. Significantly, however, both turned their backs on the radicals in their generation who wanted to shove theatrical values out the window on a high floor.

In his early years Taylor had a bad experience with audiences walking out and critics penning blank reviews, and Ailey never considered abandoning bravura dance technique, uplifting music, or romance. Their example guided younger artists back into the arms of the public, safeguarding a future for their art. Ailey and Taylor revitalized modern dance with their showmanship. They were the first, not the last; leaders, not followers. Consequently Taylor’s “Arden Court,” set in a garden hideaway for lovers, with Baroque music and a giant rose emblazoned on the backdrop, suits Ailey wonderfully.

And the Ailey dancers! Oh, my. While they still handle their new masterpiece carefully, it would be hard to imagine a more brilliant cast. Heroically bare-chested and twisting to display two angles at once, the men have long, gorgeous lines. They gather in thickets, or traverse the stage in soaring leaps. The women are delicate, yet powerful. Dynamic extremes, from rock-solid balances to breathless speed, come easily to them.

In contrasting duets, lovers dote upon their beaux. Rachael McLaren, among the most vividly assured in the young Ailey crowd, scampers busily around Glenn Allen Sims, ducking under his leg and stepping over it, while he moves at a slower pace like an architect dreaming of monuments. She makes herself look small, with mincing steps, so she can perch on him and he can be her sheltering giant.

Linda Celeste Sims is the focus of Kirven J. Boyd’s attentions, her serene extensions a magnet for his nattering, lightning-quick inspection. Michael Francis McBride and Samuel Lee Roberts provide comic relief as the come-back kids, and when Taylor decides it’s time to be grandly lyrical, Alicia Graf Mack and her willowy partner, Antonio Douthit, make a stunning appearance.

Gene Moore’s costumes have been adapted to match the dancers’ skin-tones, with iridescent silver leaves now dappling chocolate leotards, but it would be less distracting if everyone simply wore the same color.

“Arden Court” is timeless, not revolutionary. Yet dancing Taylor’s work marks a departure for the Ailey company, which has a new curator in artistic director Robert Battle. Once again, this company is taking the long view.



Paul Kolnik  
Linda Celeste Sims and Kirven J. Boyd in the Alvin Ailey  
American Dance Theater production of "Arden Court"

### Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

**Where:** New York City Center, 55th St. between Sixth and Seventh Aves.

**When:** 7 p.m., Tues.; 8 p.m., Wed.-Sat.; and 7:30 p.m., Sun., with matinees at 2 p.m., Sat. and 3 p.m., Sun., Dec. 3-Jan. 1

**How Much:** Tickets are \$25-\$175.

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