

# THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

## Alvin Ailey brings dance revelations to Jerusalem

In town for a series of performances, members of the famous US company lead a unique master class

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By Jessica Steinberg

Several dozen dancers spread out on the studio floor, stretching their legs, tying long hair into tight buns and ponytails, pushing baggy sweatpants over muscular thighs. Feet bare or clad in thin socks, they were poised and quiet, expectant expressions on their faces.

It was a late morning during the Sukkot holiday — a vacation day for these university and high school students. They had chosen to spend it at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance for a rare master class with two dancers from one of the world's most famous dance troupes — the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, in Israel for a series of performances supported by the U.S. Embassy.



For nearly two hours, Glenn and Linda Sims, a married couple who have been with the troupe for 15 and 16 years, respectively, led the dancers through the paces of the Horton technique — a modern dance approach that includes a wide range of moves and is a key part of Alvin Ailey's rehearsal work.

The dancers gradually moved from stationary poses to movement, gracefully squatting pliés on the floor — “As if their legs were lips,” suggested Glenn Sims — then sweeping the floor with their bodies, “adding a little Mark Morris or being Cunninghamish,” he said, referring to choreographers Mark Morris and Merce Cunningham. They moved on to the dramatic bird pose that is a well-known move from “Revelations,” the signature Alvin Ailey piece included in every performance.

The Sims, who met at Alvin Ailey in 1997, were in Israel for an extended visit with the rest of the troupe, which performed eight times — once in Jerusalem and the rest in Tel Aviv — along with two master classes and an open rehearsal. The master classes are part of what makes Alvin Ailey dancers “cultural ambassadors” to the world, said Dacquiri Smittick, the company manager who accompanied the Sims to the Jerusalem class.

“We work a lot and we tour a lot, and having the chance to do master classes lets us really connect with the local audience,” she said. “It's something we don't get to do everywhere.”



Linda and Glenn Sims share stories about life as a married couple in the dance troupe (photo credit: Jessica Steinberg/Times of Israel)

Alvin Ailey has forged a special relationship with Israel, said Smittick: The 30-member troupe has been coming here every three years or so, as much for the “great audience energy” in Israel, said Smittick, as for access to the Tel Aviv beach. “We're all much darker than when we came,” she joked.

Professional relationships have been created between American and Israeli dancers in the last few years. Several Alvin Ailey dancers and Batsheva Dance Company members attended New York's Julliard School together. Ohad Naharin, a former Batsheva dancer and noted choreographer, was married to Alvin Ailey dancer Mari Kajiwaru, who died of cancer 11 years ago. The American troupe recently began performing Naharin's “Minus 16” work last year.

“We love coming here,” said Linda Sims, who has been in Israel four times. “We feel your energy from the stage.”