

TM Reviews

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: Best of 20 Years

Reviewed By: [Brian Scott Lipton](#) · Dec 16, 2009 · New York

In today's times, a 20th anniversary of any sort is not to be taken lightly, and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is giving due praise to the milestone of Judith Jamison's tenure as the company's artistic director in its current City Center season with such events as performances of Jamison's *Hymn* featuring live appearances by Anna Deavere Smith (starting on December 16). But perhaps the centerpiece of the celebration is the newly created [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: Best of 20 Years](#), featuring excerpts from 13 different pieces commissioned or revived by Jamison over the past two decades.

What makes the often-enticing (if somewhat choppy) program of particular interest to theater lovers is that many of the choreographers represented work both in modern dance and on Broadway, including Lar Lubovitch (*North Star*), Donald McKayle (*Rainbow Round My Shoulder*), and Donald Byrd (*Dance at the Gym*). In addition, actor and playwright Carl Hancock Rux is heard providing the narration for Jawole Willa Jo Jollar's *Shelter*.

A particular highlight of the piece is an excerpt from Tony Award winner Garth Fagan's 1993 piece *Jukebox for Alvin*, set to the music of Dvorjak, and brilliantly danced by Clifton Brown, who brings a balletic grace and dramatic intensity to this solo number. Luckily for viewers, Brown's panther-like agility and flawless technique -- not to mention his body -- are also on display in the magnificent duet excerpted from Ulysses Dove's *Bad Blood*, in which he's sublimely partnered by Linda Celeste Sims, and in a section from Alonso King's haunting *Following the Subtle Current Upstream*. (As is the Ailey wont, much of the male form is on view throughout the evening, while the women remain far more clothed, even in the orgy-like *Lettres D'Amour*.)

If Brown is, to some extent, the evening's main attraction, *The Best of 20 Years* makes sure to shine a spotlight on its two most seasoned dancers: Renee Robinson, who has been part of Ailey for close to 30 years and still proves her expressiveness in the "Come Sunday" solo from Ronald K. Brown's gorgeous *Grace* and in a duet with Glenn Allen Sims from *Polish Pieces*, and the amazing and extraordinarily graceful Matthew Rushing, who delivers a standout solo from Dwight Rhoden's *Frames*.

Naturally, the company as a whole is given its moments as well, with the evening being bookended by Talley Beatty's large-scale *The Stack-Up* and Billy Wilson's exuberant *The Winter in Lisbon*, perhaps the most feel-good piece in the Ailey repertory. But most of all, *The Best of 20 Years* makes a strong case for the breadth and depth of Jamison's vision for the company.



Judith Jamison (center) and company members of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
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