

TORONTO STANDARD

Dance in the City: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre *Powerful, lyrical depictions of African American culture.*

February 3, 2012
By Victoria Mohr-Blakeney

Hailed as an international ambassador for African-American culture, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, founded in 1958, begins its 27-city North American tour in Toronto under the new direction of Robert Battle. Comprising seven dances split between two programs alternating each night, the show runs from February 2-4 at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts.

Known for their virtuosic performances, the company's versatility and stylistic range is immediately striking. The show opens with the quick-paced raw energy of hip hop choreographer Rennie Harris' world premier *Home*, followed by Robert Battle's *Takademe* (1999), and *The Hunt* (2001), then transitions to the elegant arcs and extensions of Joyce Trisler's meditative solo, *Journey* (1958), and finally closes with the company's signature piece, the all time American classic: *Revelations*. Eclectic, yet riveting, it spans over fifty years of choreographic innovation.



In *Home*, drawing from the rhythmic vocabularies of street dance, hip hop, and club dance, the dancers tune their bodies to a frequency of repetitive movement which builds slowly, both in velocity and intensity to house music, all the while paying homage to African dance roots.

The Hunt, choreographed by Battle, features six bare-chested male dancers in a ritualistic war dance of violence and domination. Piercing and acute, powerful yet controlled, these men charge the air with angular and decisive movements, shifting in and out of a circular pack.

The show's stand-out performance, however, is given by Kirven James Boyd in Battle's *Takademe*. Captivating the audience through a series of sharp jabs, twists, and undulating torso isolations, Boyd's body becomes an electric sounding board for Sheila Chandry's percussive score. As Boyd contorts, each note is physicalized and punctuated by his head, wrist, shoulder, and hips, as the percussive tones reverberate, with meticulous precision, through every fiber his body in this stunning solo performance.

Before the lights even come up on the final act, cheers ring out for the iconic American classic, *Revelations*, and the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre does not disappoint. Like any true classic, *Revelations*, choreographed by Alvin Ailey in 1960, continues to thrill audiences, standing up to fifty years of history. With a beautiful yet subtle lighting design by Nicola Cernovitch, this piece is a time capsule of Ailey's impressions of the American south, startling for its innovation, choreographic vision, and powerful, lyrical depictions of African American culture