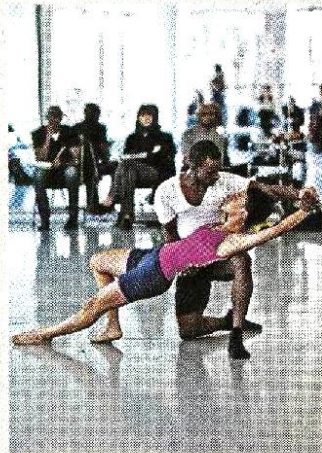


November 11, 2011

DANCE

For Alvin Ailey, a New Leader—and a New Style



Rehearsing Ohad Naharin's 'Minus 16.'

THE DANCE WORLD will be watching the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater closely this fall—it's the first season for the group's new artistic director, Robert Battle, who replaced longtime director Judith Jamison. Adding to the challenge: The dancers are trying a new, unfamiliar dance style. They are tackling Gaga, a form of contemporary dance known for aggressive physicality and dramatic, raw power.

Created by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin, the technique (unrelated to the pop star Lady Gaga) can be beautiful and precise, but it's not pretty. "What I do is very particular," said Mr. Naharin before a recent rehearsal at the Ailey studios. "It's about connecting to weakness, laughing—not from storytelling, but from something like tickling."

The Ailey dancers have been learning Mr. Naharin's "Minus 16" for their season at New York City Center, Nov. 30 to Jan. 1. Set to music that ranges from Dean Martin to techno to traditional Israel songs, the piece is at turns funny, romantic, reflective and propulsive. The style pushes the modern dancers—who are used to shaping every move for maximum loveliness or heroic masculinity in the typical Ailey style—to be more earthy and vulnerable.

Mr. Battle said he was looking for a challenge like this in his first season at the helm. This fall, the company will also dance a classic work, "Arden Court," by Paul Taylor for the first time, as well as a new piece by hip-hop choreographer Rennie Harris. As he watched Mr. Naharin and his assistant Danielle Agami teach the company "Minus 16," Mr. Battle said approvingly, "Some of what they are getting the dancers to do are things they haven't been exposed to."

—Pia Catton

View online slideshow: [here](#)