



March 10–16, 2005

Turning points

Bless the building

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater held its own version of a ribbon-cutting ceremony last Wednesday to officially inaugurate the opening of its **Joan Weill Center for Dance**. The event, a performance in its own right, was a chaotic masterpiece. The lobby of the building, located at the corner of 55th Street and Ninth Avenue, was crammed with people as musicians (a group of drummers sat on one side, a brass band on the other) performed. In front, students from the Ailey School held opposite ends of a piece of pale sea-green fabric—the material used in the “Wade in the Water” section of Ailey’s classic *Revelations*. Mayor **Michael R. Bloomberg** stood by as artistic director **Judith Jamison** and Weill sliced the satin wave in half.

As **Wycliffe Gordon** and the Juilliard Jazz Ensemble, with soloist **Ella Mitchell**, launched into the gospel gem “Wade in the Water,” a group of dancers wound their way down the sidewalk to lead a processional into the new building’s lower-level theater. It was a scrappy, under-rehearsed delight. Once inside, Reverend **Robert Polk** offered a prayer of dedication, and Jamison made the obligatory speech, trying with all her might to make the ordeal seem folksy and casual (“What am I supposed to do now?” she asked at one point). Chairman of the board Weill,

largely responsible for securing the funding for the company’s fantastic building, spoke of tall ceilings, exposed windows, light and sprung floors—and in a terrifically ridiculous moment, unintentionally referred to Bloomberg as *Bling-berg*.

Bloomberg, one of those mayors who happens to know the difference between ballet and modern dance, said all the right things about the spectacular space and then, as he is wont to do, took it a bit further: “You wonder what people are going to say as they drive by over the years and look up and see the dancers going through all of their practices and performing!” he exclaimed. “What it’s going to do is open people’s eyes and expand their minds, even people who don’t know very much about dance. They’ll start to

say, ‘God, that guy—look at those muscles! Look at that woman—how graceful! How does she do that?’ And that’s exactly what you want to do with art. You want to get people to think. Not everybody can dance and not everybody’s going to like every particular dance, but we need to get people to appreciate what humankind has developed over the years.” It was just like Bloomberg to say something a little bit goofy, but totally sweet.