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ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Rocking the Soul of Dance for a Half-Century

"Revelations," the signature hit of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, turns 50 this year. Above, foreground, the artistic director, Judith Jamison, leads a rehearsal of the last section of the dance. (Fans must be held just so.) "Revelations" is being celebrated this season at City Center, and reflections of company members appear on Page 5, with more images at [nytimes.com/dance](http://nytimes.com/dance).



# Moved by the Spirit: Celebrating 'Revelations' at 50

Members of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform "Revelations" nearly as often as ordinary people brush their teeth. This magnificent work, created by Alvin Ailey in 1960, is a dance on land and in water, a journey through African-American spiritual music and, for dancers, an act of reverence for the generations that came before.

"It doesn't matter how tired I am," said Briana Reed, a

company member since 1998. "As soon as the music starts, I feel myself transported to another place."

Told in three sections — "Pilgrim of Sorrow," "Take Me to the Water" and "Move, Members, Move" — Ailey's burning exploration of grief and joy celebrates its 50th anniversary on Wednesday at City Center. As part of the season-long commemoration, the troupe's artistic director, Judith

Jamison, will conduct performances on Friday and Saturday nights. "It's like a port de bras for me," she said. "It's just so easy to breathe with that music."

Recently Ms. Jamison and a few others fleshed out crucial moments of the dance. "It means the world to me to have done that ballet," she said. "It's a classic work, and it will remain in my body."

GIA KOURLAS



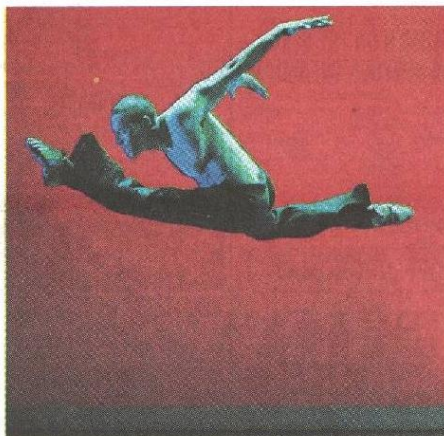
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## 'Sinner Man' From 'Move, Members, Move'

When Clifton Brown first performed the second variation of "Sinner Man," which showcases three male virtuosos, he loved it as any young dancer would — for its dazzling leaps and pirouettes. (In the photo at right, he is captured in a bison jump that makes it seem as if his body had popped straight into the air.) "There's also the actual aspect of what's going on: running for your own salvation," Mr. Brown said. "It's Judgment Day, and it needs to have all of that energy and desperation because you don't want to be damned. You're a small part of a huge world or universe because it's something much greater than you — you need to be seen as a frantic being in a huge world." The dancers are, as Ms. Jamison put it, "up against the wall where there is no place to hide."

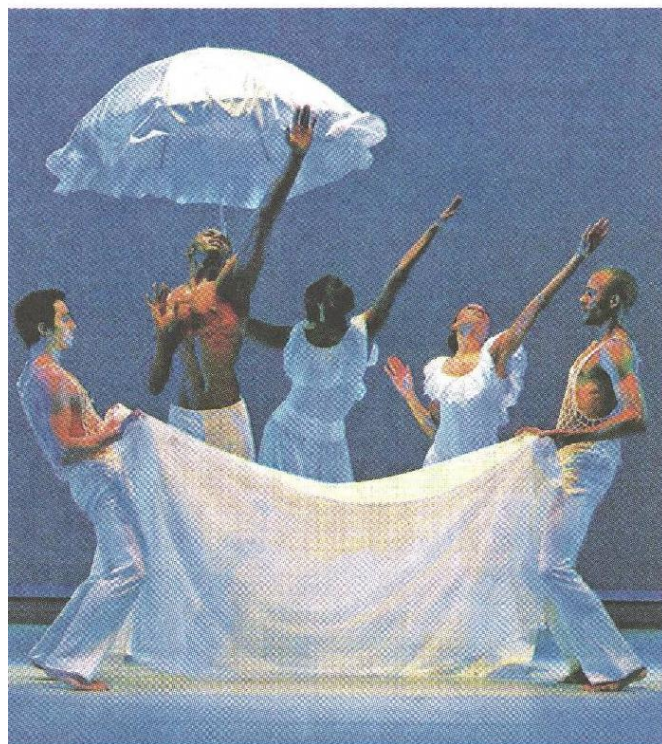
"What an extraordinary work for men!" she continued. "There is a comradeship among them — you see them signaling to each other, pumping up each other backstage. It's wonderful to watch them before they dash out of the wings at full speed and hit that wall, and there's no place to hide. I love watching it."



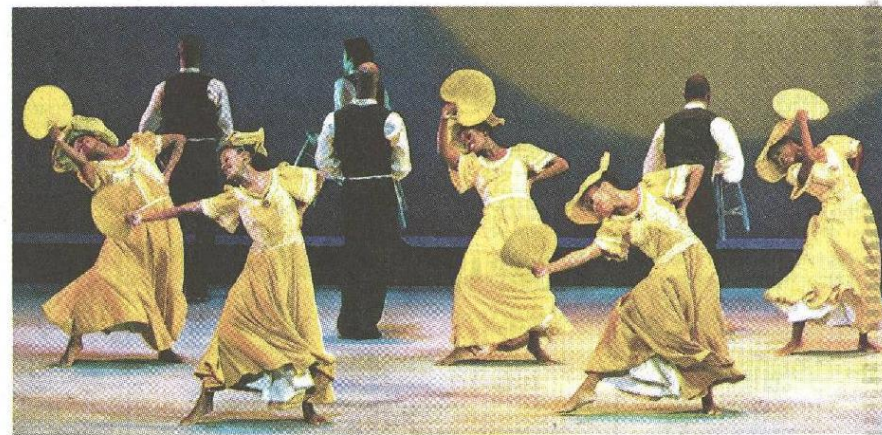
## 'I Been 'Buked' From 'Pilgrim of Sorrow'

Ms. Jamison calls "'Buked,' above, the ultimate prayer. "I always tell the dancers, 'If you're not sweating after you do that, then you haven't done it correctly,'" she said. "That is a hard dance to do, to give it the sense of strain and weight, even if it's just by listening to the words: 'I've been 'buked, and I've been scorned.' That is the weight of the world on shoulders being pulled down into the earth." Such yearning comes to life through the movement — arms outstretched, heads tilted back, the dancers lift their sternums toward the heavens. Masazumi Chaya, the company's associate artistic director, said: "Actually, the movement drops, but I don't want it to really drop. I want the dancers to catch it! And open their hearts to receive it. I tell them to receive that light, and that energy comes through." The dancer Amos J. Machanic Jr., center rear, added: "Life has just beaten you down, but at the same time the words also talk about not giving up even in the midst of sorrow, even in the midst of a storm. When that music comes on, a sense of calm comes over me, and it reminds me of how badly I wanted to be in the company."

## 'Processional/Honor, Honor' From 'Take Me to the Water'



In this sacred, joyful section — captured here moments before "Wade in the Water," in which rippling sheets of silk are held across the stage — a woman prepares for her baptism. Linda Celeste Sims, at left, second from right, said: "It's about cleansing and changing and becoming someone better. The beauty of 'Revelations' is that we are all dealing with something, and it doesn't matter what religion or race or nationality we are. We can start to move ahead — not worrying so much about the past, but continuing forward. It's like you're being baptized." For Ms. Jamison, it depicts a serious ritual of the church: "The baptism is one of the holiest events in the church, particularly in the black church, and so being completely submerged in that water and brought up and having a new life is what that is about. In that we see hope."



## 'Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham' From 'Move, Members, Move'

Leading up to the finale, "Rocka My Soul," women wear long yellow dresses and matching hats and carry fans. In other words, it's time for church, and it's going to be a hot day. Briana Reed, above, center, who started out in Ailey II, learned "Revelations" from Sylvia Waters, its artistic director, who gave detailed instructions on how to hold the fan. "The pinky finger loops through the hole and then you flip the fan around so that your thumb faces front," Ms. Reed said. "Also, you notice we have our hands on our backs a lot or kind of wrapped around the hip — she was very specific about

where that hand and elbow should be: not by your hip, like you're being sassy, but up near your ribs, so that it gives the upper body a more dignified carriage." The section always brings down the house. "You know how the beginning of 'Revelations' is called 'Pilgrim of Sorrow'?" Ms. Reed asked. "For me it's never that — it's heavy, but I don't feel a sense of sorrow. By the end it's joyous relief. People have found a moment, a glimpse of light within all of the hardships. It's a happy time, and there's the sense of just being elated at knowing that there is something bigger than you."