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DANCE

REVIEW

Mélange of moods from Ailey troupe



PAUL KOLNIK

A SEQUENCE from "Untitled America." Kyle Abraham's uncompromising choreographic vision and powerful company showpiece dealing with imprisonment.



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Endurance in troubled times

The Alvin Ailey dance troupe explores crucial life lessons, including in "Untitled America," above. **E13**

BY LEWIS SEGAL

Endurance, survival, getting through troubled times: The program that the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater presented at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion on Wednesday focused on crucial life lessons — some of them grim.

Other programs in the six-performance engagement ending Sunday will explore different moods and experiences. But on this opening-night bill, the sole concession to joyous diversion came in a five-minute dance duet set to Ella Fitzgerald's virtuoso scat-singing.

Choreographed by Artistic Director Robert Battle, "Ella" sent Jacquelin Harris and Megan Jakel on a mad race to match the uncanny velocity, rhythmic surety and sense of play in the recorded vocals. Of course Fitzgerald's spectacular range extremes and sudden inclusions of fragments from pop songs left them scrambling, but otherwise the dancers delivered this high-energy tribute splendidly.

The company also looked terrific in "r-Evolution, Dream." That's Hope Boykin's complex and not altogether successful attempt to wrap texts that inspired Martin Luther King Jr. around a fine commissioned jazz score by Ali Jackson. Those accompaniments then fueled an arbitrary action-plan in which color-coded cadres danced in a style merging modern and pop. Boykin designed those costumes, juxtaposing dancers in black, white, dull green and vibrant plum.

Every so often the spoken statements about self-realization indicated that Boykin (also a dancer with the company) wanted us to measure the value of human life through the qualities of mind and soul. But even when the color-coding

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Where: Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 N. Grand Ave., L.A.

When: 7:30 p.m. Friday, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday (different programs in each performance)

Tickets: \$34 and up (subject to change)

Info: (213) 972-0711, musiccenter.org/ailey

yielded to a more inclusive social statement, her high-falutin conceptual ambitions didn't mesh with her instincts as a dance entertainer. Mind and soul were mentioned but remained formless, forgotten in the audience-courting Broadway-style finale.

Along the way, solos by the tireless Jakel (red hair flying) and Matthew Rushing (with the sharpest transitions imaginable) grounded the piece in Ailey excellence. But for an uncompromising choreographic vision that also managed to be a powerful company showpiece, it was Kyle Abraham's "Untitled America" that triumphed.

Even if you didn't know that the work dealt with imprisonment — not only the lives of the prisoners but also those waiting for them on the outside — the sense of isolation, oppression, struggle and hopeless fury remained palpable. Music from a variety of sources and spoken documentary testimony supplemented the stark groupings and bursts of constricted action danced in either semi-darkness or searchlight glare. Lighting by Dan Scully became a full partner in Abraham's vision, though the periodic raising and lowering of a scrim curtain seemed a pointless in-

trusion. Karen Young designed the deliberately shabby costumes.

Midway through Jeroboam Bozeman provided an unforgettable statement of unleashed violence and at the end Chalvar Monteiro supplied an incredibly supple depiction of despair. But balancing these downbeat contributions, Abraham allowed moments of deep connection to ennoble the participants and confirmed their unvanquished humanity. Abraham is increasingly celebrated these days for such offbeat, indelible dance dramas. His own company appears on Santa Monica's Broad Stage on May 5 and 6.

Company founder Ailey's 1960 piece "Revelations" is an imperishable statement of human resilience and faith, grounded in the memories of his youth. It will be danced at every performance in the L.A. engagement, part of the Glogau Kaufman Presents Dance at the Music Center series. So even if the Wednesday cast occasionally looked a mite off its game, enough remained to satisfy devotees prepared to cheer the major moments — often *before* they occurred. Among the worthiest worthies: Daniel Harder ("Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel"), Linda Celeste Sims and Jamar Roberts ("Fix Me, Jesus") and Bozeman in multiple assignments. As usual, the audience demanded an encore.

The company danced all four works to recordings on Wednesday, and the result wasn't always trouble-free. As mentioned, Boykin and Abraham relied on spoken texts to establish contexts for their choreographies. But the sound system often made those recorded texts undecipherable, lost in the sonic murk. Maybe it's time for supertitles or closed-captioning at Dorothy Chandler dance events.

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