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Omicron Fears Fail to Stop New Yorkers at Favorite Time of Year

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New Yorkers had a message for omicron on Wednesday night: We got this. We're not letting a new variant stop us. It came from the throngs who gathered to see the tree lighting at Rockefeller Center, and from the ticket-holders for opening night of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's season at City Center, its first since 2019.

"There's a sense the city's ready to be back, and people want to continue to move on," said Daria Wallach, chair of Alvin Ailey and former managing partner of Lord, Abbett & Co., who'd been to Rockefeller Center earlier. The key is that they can gather safely. "We're taking every precaution," she added.

"I feel a little paranoid, but good," actress Lorraine Toussaint said before the Ailey performance and gala, which raised \$1.7 million. "We've got to be vaccinated to mitigate the fear."

"It's about being realistic about the paranoia," said Nicolas Rohatyn, whose wife, art dealer Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, is part of a Planned Parenthood art auction and party in Miami Beach Thursday night. City Center, which reopened in October, requires double vaccination and mask-wearing. Ailey's post-performance supper at the Ziegfeld Ballroom had the same rules.

"We're going to have Covid for a long time, and we need to enjoy our lives as much as we possibly can, and the arts are a critical part of that" said Arlene Shuler, City Center's chief executive officer. "Seeing Ailey and seeing 'Revelations,' it's a moment of saying we are going to be joyful and keep moving forward."

Robert Battle, Ailey's artistic director, put it this way: "Anytime we can get to dance, whatever that means, I think it's so important. We've had full doses of reality, now it's time to suspend that reality and find joy."

Shouts of appreciation came not just at the end of each work, but throughout, punctuating the music, which included Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Parker, Stevie Wonder and the spirituals of "Revelations." For Peloton instructor Ally Love, who studied at Ailey, being part of the audience felt different. "It was a dialog," she said. "I didn't feel I was watching. I felt part of the performance. It unlocked something inside of me that maybe had been dormant."

The energy kept going at supper, with guests such as Citigroup Chief Financial Officer Mark Mason dining on short rib at tables decorated with piles of white and black feathers. The room was full and hopping through dessert. It seemed people were clinging tightly to the moment, unsure of what comes next.

For some, the harsh realities include the recent declines in the stock market. "Alvin Ailey is a cure for a lot of things," said Sandy Weill, former head of Citigroup. "One of them is not the market." At which point his wife, Joan, added, "You never know."