

[Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater review — a New York troupe bursting with personality](#)

By: Debra Craine
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Moves to thrill the heart

The New York-based troupe offer a dazzling choice of delights, says **Debra Craine**

dance
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
Sadler's Wells
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Constance Stamatou in Ronald K Brown's *Dancing Spirit*, which paid tribute to Judith Jamison

It's a little hard to get your head around the various programmes being offered by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in its two-week London season. That's because there are four of them and some works pop up in more than one. Never mind which you choose, though, because they all showcase a wealth of choreography and the consistently high standard of dancing from this popular New York troupe.

Robert Battle, the artistic director, introduced himself with a pair of short works in the opening programme (the evening was called *Contemporary Voices*). *Unfold* (2007) is the odder of the two, a tortured duet (urgently performed on the first night by Ashley Mayeux and Jeroboam Bozeman) that seems weirdly opposed to the recorded music, Leontyne Price singing *Depuis le jour*, the ecstatically love-drenched aria from Charpentier's opera *Louise*. Yet confusingly here on stage we see two dancers enduring what seems to be a tale of struggle and desperation.

Battle's *For Four* (2021), on the other hand, was born to please, with a quartet of dancers flying through a fleet and sparky display of cheeky jazz set to music by the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. The four dancers exhibit heaps of personality along with

exceptional agility and precise technique as they dart across the stage with glee. It's as if the crotchets and quavers of Marsalis's music have leapt from the page to the stage.

The second programme (branded *Modern Masters*) had to be rearranged because of illness. So we didn't get Twyla Tharp's *Roy's Joys*, but we did see Ronald K Brown's *Dancing Spirit* (2009, restaged 2023), in which he celebrates the power of dance and pays tribute to Judith Jamison, who ran the Ailey company for more than 20 years. Nine dancers give themselves over to the music (Duke Ellington, Marsalis, Radiohead and War) and the moves, which take their cue from Cuba, Africa and American modern dance. From quietly statuesque beginnings to a propulsive, buoyant finale, Brown's creation is part spiritual, part ritual — physically vibrant and wholly engaging.

Elsewhere, look out for Kyle Abraham's sensuous love essay *Are You in Your Feelings?* (reviewed in *Edinburgh* last month) and Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* (1960), a barnstorming ode to joy and salvation that evokes the African-American experience of his churchgoing Texas childhood. To September 16, sadlerswells.com