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WEEKEND



Kyle Abraham's "Untitled America" explores inequities in the United States' prison system.

DANCING TO EXPLORE AMERICAN INJUSTICE

Alvin Ailey gets to hard issue's heart

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The world of dance has some iconic imagery: Sugarplum fairies, swans in lakes ... detainees in American prisons.

That third one might not sound so familiar now, but with the final installation of choreographer Kyle Abraham's "Untitled America" premiering in the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's winter season, the three-part piece that looks at the far-reaching impact of the nation's prison system could join the ranks of important dance works.

"What Alvin Ailey wanted this company to be about, was not just to entertain, but to educate and to look at those hard issues of the day through the prism of modern dance," says Alvin Ailey's artistic director Robert Battle.

So when Abraham approached him with the idea of deconstructing the effect the prison system has on African-American families, Battle saw the work as a perfect fit with the company's mission. The finished work is a story "that gets to the heart of the matter, not just the political

IF YOU GO

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's winter season, featuring a repertory of more than 25 works, is on now through Dec. 31. Tickets \$25+, New York City Center, 131 W 55th St., alvinailey.org

wranglings," Battle says.

How does this translate on stage? It's through the raw movements of the dancers. It seeps off the stage with audio recordings of interviews with former inmates, as well as the parents, children and loved ones of prisoners and those whose lives intertwine with them. Blended with the stirring music of Laura Mvula and Raimie this accumulates into a powerful multisensory experience.

"That's the wonderful thing about dance," Battle says. "Words can sometimes be so polarizing that people can't get beyond the words to hear the message. Dance can be wonderfully ambiguous ... through the abstraction of movement you're being taken into the subject matter in a way that allows the viewer to be taken by it and not be afraid of it."

"Untitled America" will be performed on Dec. 7, 11, 15, 18, 24 and 30.