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Jacqueline Green in *Revelations*, performed every night on tour

No one can rain on their parade

This troupe is as artistically ambitious as it is energetic and exciting, says Debra Craine

Dance
Alvin Ailey
American Dance
Theatre
Sadler's Wells
★★★★☆

When Alvin Ailey founded his modern dance company in 1958, with the idea of reflecting the African

American experience on stage, he could never have imagined that it would become one of his country's pre-eminent cultural exports. And it is international tours, such as the one that was launched in London on Tuesday, that have helped to set the seal on the troupe's amazing success.

Energy and excitement are the hallmarks of its performance style, but the programme (there are two more to come) that opened the London season shows how far the company has travelled artistically. Bringing Christopher Wheeldon's

After the Rain Pas de Deux into the repertoire is something the Ailey troupe would never have done a decade ago, but under Robert Battle's direction its stylistic horizons have been hugely broadened. A sign of that is that dancers from Alvin Ailey will join the Royal Ballet for the revival of Wayne McGregor's *Chroma* at the Opera House in November.

This six-week Dance Consortium tour kicked off with *Exodus* (2015), a dark spiritual journey of the soul that reads like a grim snapshot of racism in America. Rennie Harris's hip-hop-flavoured choreography evokes the landscape of violence that blights so many black communities.

It begins looking like a battlefield strewn with corpses; gradually the dead are reanimated into Harris's punchy, articulated rhythms and exhilarating speeds. His choreography is quick witted and very entertaining — street dance with a showbiz ethic — and spiced with defiance, though the sound of gunfire leaves us in no doubt as to where fate will lead. The cast of 16 was compelling, led by the astoundingly powerful Jamar Roberts.

Ronald K Brown's *Four Corners* (2013) is less specific and less successful, as it attempts to fuse western modern dance with African folk dances. The loose-hipped choreography has a nice swing to it but more variety in the writing would avoid the sensation that it is repeating itself too often. As for the *After the Rain* duet, Akua Noni Parker and Roberts brought a hypnotic sensuality to Wheeldon's balletic writing, embracing the slow-moving connections (the music is Arvo Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* after all) with every fibre of their bodies.

The night ended, as always, with *Revelations*, Ailey's 1960 masterwork, a gospel-fuelled suite of inspirational dances that hark back to the African American experience in the pre-civil rights Deep South. The company must be able to perform *Revelations* in its sleep, but the enthusiastic dancers showed no signs of fatigue as Ailey's evocation of toil and trouble, of sorrow, faith and joy, worked its magic. **Box office: 020 7863 8000, to Sept 17. Touring to Oct 19**