Expressing A Sorrow Without End

Jamar Roberts’s work about gun violence is an emotional assault.
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ing two tempi at once.

Something similar is at work among the dancers. Their connection is palpably strong but under threat, and the interplay of unison and do-your-own-thing — the call-and-response between soloist and group — keeps up an underlyng tension parallel to the music.

Often, the dancers hand together, hand in hand, arm in arm. And still they fail, one or another, the collapse coinciding with a slammed bass note, a sudden synchronicity that gives a formal feeling to the pain.

There’s a formal feeling, also, in Libby Studstad’s scenic design: a giant backdrop of cloth netting in a wallpaperlike floral pattern reminiscent of Kehinde Wiley paintings. The costumes, by Mr. Roberts, are simple pajama pants, subtly stained. The torsos of the all-male opening-night cast (an alternate cast is all-female) are bare.

The premiere of “Ode” came in the middle of a program celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Alvin Ailey school. “Memoria,” the only work by Alvin Ailey to feature students, opened the evening, and students danced in the aisles at the end of the standard closer, “Revelations.”

“Ode,” right, by the choreographer Jamar Roberts, is delicate, daring and heartbreaking.

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