Two takes on topic of race hit two stages

By: Cynthia Perry
For the AJC
February 2, 2020

Atlanta News. Now.

Two takes on topic of race hit two stages

'Greenwood,' 'Sunrise Divine' coincide with Black History Month

By Cynthia Perry
For the AJC

Two major dance companies take very different approaches to the topic of race in productions debuting on Atlanta stages this month.

In preparation, a diverse group of dancers gathered in an Atlanta ballet studio last month as a recorded choir sang, "Halil-Le-Jab"—each syllable a crisp note skipping down a harmonious scale. The music grew louder and faster as several men carried dancer Jessica Asbell along a diagonal path, her form an arabesque with one pointe gliding boldly along the floor. With a surge in the score, they vaulted her overhead as she reached a tête-à-tête, the dancers cheering her on.

This was "Sunrise Divine," a jubilant new work by Artists of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, as they prepared for their Atlanta debut. The company is one of the leading contemporary dance companies in the United States, and their work often touches on themes of identity, culture, and race.

Meanwhile, Donald Byrd, who recently announced his retirement as Artistic Director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, joined the company to choreograph a new work titled "Greenwood." Byrd is a renowned choreographer and dancer who has made significant contributions to the world of contemporary dance, particularly in the realm of African-American culture and history.

The two works, "Sunrise Divine" and "Greenwood," represent different perspectives on the topic of race and identity in contemporary dance. "Sunrise Divine" explores themes of hope, freedom, and the future through a jubilant and celebratory narrative, while "Greenwood" delves into historical events and the struggle for civil rights in the Jim Crow era.

Both works are part of a larger conversation about race and identity in contemporary dance, as companies continue to explore and represent diverse narratives and perspectives on the stage.

As the world continues to grapple with issues of race, identity, and social justice, dance companies like Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Donald Byrd's company provide a platform for artists to express their stories and experiences, fostering dialogue and understanding among audiences.