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Audiences amazed by Ailey II

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"I just can't for the life of me believe that this is a second company," a woman said to no one in particular as the lights came up for the first intermission of the Dance St. Louis showcase of Ailey II Saturday night at the Touhill Performing Arts Center.

The woman couldn't contain her excitement after seeing the troupe's performance of "Still," which was choreographed by St. Louis transplant and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater alum Kirven Douthit-Boyd.

The intricate piece that displays Douthit-Boyd's stunning attention to detail made it clear why he remains a much sought after choreographer while simultaneously co-directing COCA's dance department with husband Antonio Douthit-Boyd, a St. Louis native whose gift allowed him to dance his way from COCA to Ailey.

Emotionally charged and physically demanding, "Still" showcased the best of what the troupe had to offer.

"Outstanding!" the woman said. She was so excited about the first performance, because she was almost unable to attend due to the high demand.

"I would have liked to have been closer, but was blessed to get the seat that I'm in," the woman said. "My friend, who I came with, is way up there," she said, pointing to the balcony.



The show was sold-out by Christmas. And the second company of the dance institution that is synonymous with excellence within the art form lived up to the Ailey reputation of presenting world-class dance. In "Still," Ailey II delivered their best performance of the three ballets, though the audience responded most to "Revelations."

Bradley Shelver's "Where There Are Tongues" saw the dancers masterfully execute the difficult task of keeping an invisible beat as much of the music was acapella voice.

Ailey's masterpiece of a ballet that sets the African American experience to dance is the company's signature production – and was the only time during the two-plus hour show that Ailey II hinted at being a second company. Wonderful by most measures and with the talent and capacity to stand among the principal dancers within the world's esteemed dance troupe, seeing the primary core dancers of Ailey perform "Revelations" more than once made it impossible to not notice slight shortcomings with respect to flexibility, lines and overall poise.

But the genius of ballet – which is one of the most well-known and highly regarded dance pieces in the world – was not lost on the people who filled the Touhill to capacity. It was apparent from the palpable amazement of the Revelations as the finale revealed that Ailey's intention of creating a religious experience through dance was once again fulfilled.

"The ballet is still so relevant, and it is something to celebrate," Ailey II Artistic Director Troy Powell told Dance St. Louis Managing Director Christopher Mohnani in a pre-show discussion that also featured Antonio and Kirven Douthit-Boyd.

"When you perform it, it's almost like an out of body experience," Powell said, adding that Ailey would want the audience to see it and leave with a new perspective of the human experience.

"If he were here, I feel like he would say, 'I hope that from this journey that we are about to take you on, that afterwards you say, 'I learned something about myself,'" Powell said.

"We hope to change lives tonight."

Based on the thunderous ovation from the seats, Powell's expression of Ailey's wish was fulfilled.