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`Revelations` for Trying Times

When the pandemic arrived, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was forced to cancel performances. But this June it will stream a new production.

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THE STAYING INSIDE GUIDE--DANCE

`Revelations` for Trying Times

Ailey All Access offers streaming dance programs, including a recording of the company's iconic creation.

**Since 2013,** the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has appeared annually at Lincoln Center’s David H. Koch Theater. This year is the exception, somewhat. As part of its Ailey All Access series of online presentations, this June it will stream four-part mixed bills, performed on the stage of the Alvin Ailey Spirit Gala, which will stream all week and be available for a week.

While the quadrum bill will be available on DVD and Blu-ray, the streaming premiere, which is free on the Ailey All Access site, includes a recently made documentary that has several talking heads introducing the program’s capstone: the internationally popular and audience-pleasing “Revelations,” choreographed in 1960 by Ailey, who died in 1993 at age 58.

The seven-minute intro includes clips from a 1978 interview with Ailey by Harry Belafonte but omits a telling exchange about “Revelations” in which Mr. Belafonte wonders if Ailey knew in 1960 that he’d be “doing it forever?” Mr. Belafonte asks, “does it bother you?”—to which Mr. Belafonte asks, “is it a good idea for you?”—to which Mr. Belafonte says, “I’ve been busy,” which is a good idea for Mr. Belafonte to get a good idea of “Revelations”.

The evening begins with a 40-minute work by Ronald K. Brown, an engaging blend of modern dance and West African moves unleashed by an impressive cast of five women and six men, to a six-track mix of songs bookended by Duke Ellington’s “Come Sunday.”

Wayne McGregor’s 22-minute “Chroma” (2006), with a fashion-setting by John Pawson and mostly throbbing music by Jack White, features 10 hardworking dancers executing monotonous lengths of contorted athletic moves. Ailey Artistic Director Robert Battle also included his three-minute “Takademe” (1999) here, which plays out in a winning performance by statuette Jamar Roberts as a frequently knotty noodle taking quirky cues from Sheila Chandra’s Indian Kathak-inspired vocalizing.

The June II Ailey Spirit Gala is still being put together with the participation of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater dancers and members of the troupe’s junior company, Ailey II. Plus talented students from Ailey Camp and other “special guest appearances.” In what promises to be a new-familiar array of Zoom-like short films featuring today’s dancers, individual efforts will pay tribute to “Revelations.”

If the talking heads in the introductory footage to the 2015 film are any indication, having something fresh and insightful to offer about the 1960 masterwork isn’t easy; having the work itself accessible online should be all the testament any viewer needs.