

THE NEW YORK TIMES

DECEMBER 13, 2013

Legacy, Memory, Inspiration, AIDS

Bill T. Jones choreographed "D-Man in the Waters" in 1989, when the mortal danger of AIDS was at a high tide. The work celebrates the buoyant spirit of the

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**DANCE
REVIEW**

dancer Demian Acquavella, who had AIDS and died the following year, but swimming in its waters are many others, including Mr. Jones's partner, Arnie Zane, who had died the previous year. And at City Center on Wednesday, when Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performed "D-Man" for the first time, there was inevitably one more spirit present: Alvin Ailey, whose AIDS-related death came the year the dance was made.

If you didn't know all of that, you might not guess it. Presumably because of the time constraints of mixed bills, the company is performing only Part I of "D-Man," which is less shadowed than the work in full. Briefly, a

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues through Jan. 5 at City Center, 131 West 55th Street, Manhattan; 212-581-1212, nycitycenter.org.



PAUL KOLNIK

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater *The troupe performing the first part of Bill T. Jones's AIDS-themed "D-Man in the Waters" at City Center.*

few dancers slow, crumple and fall to their knees. A processional exit might suggest the Final Exit, though even there the departing have a bounce in their strut.

Mostly, the work is eager and headlong, riding the exuberant energy of Mendelssohn's Octet for Strings. Dancers in combat fatigues dive and roll and slide on bellies. They jump on one another's backs and over one another's rolling bodies.

Mutual assistance is a theme, and the Ailey dancers convincingly applied their esprit de corps. Jamar Roberts, giant and gentle, stood in a square of four women, catching each as she fell;

when he toppled, they gamely caught him. The sense of play could be delicious. As Hope Boykin and Alicia Graf Mack carried Antonio Douthit-Boyd and turned him like a ballerina, their delight was contagious.

One motif involves the dancers' lining up in a hurry, the person in back rushing to the front. In 1989 that image must have had some frightening connotations. Now it mostly reads as a game, yet it's also a show of continuity appropriate for a company that survived the death of its founder. Many people have been lost; more keep arriving to dance in their place.

A bounce in their strut, even if it is the Final Exit.

There's no shortage of tribute dances in the Ailey repertory. Wednesday's performance closed with Ohad Naharin's "Minus 16," which the program dedicates to Mari Kajiwarra, who was Mr. Naharin's wife and an Ailey company member. At City Center the dance is more a celebration of the Ailey audience than of any one person. Audience members are pulled onstage to dance, and in clapping for those surrogates, the audience claps for itself. (Marcus Jarrell Willis was terrific, boneless and charming, in the surprise-opening improvisation.)

The evening started with "Memoria," which Ailey made in 1979 after the death of his friend Joyce Trisler. As choreography, the dance is weak, dated by its limited vocabulary and the '70s kitsch of its Keith Jarrett score. Yet the sculptural strength of Linda Celeste Sims in the central role — absolutely secure in one tilting balance after another, sometimes while perched on Mr. Roberts's thigh — has its own value.

And the participation of students from the Ailey school in the work's celebratory second half carries the same meaning as the lining up in "D-Man." The spirit of Ailey keeps moving.