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## In Pursuit of New Flights, and Reaching Beyond Soft Landings

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which has sometimes been criticized for having a show-biz sensibility and living in the past, continued its slow, steady

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DANCE  
REVIEW

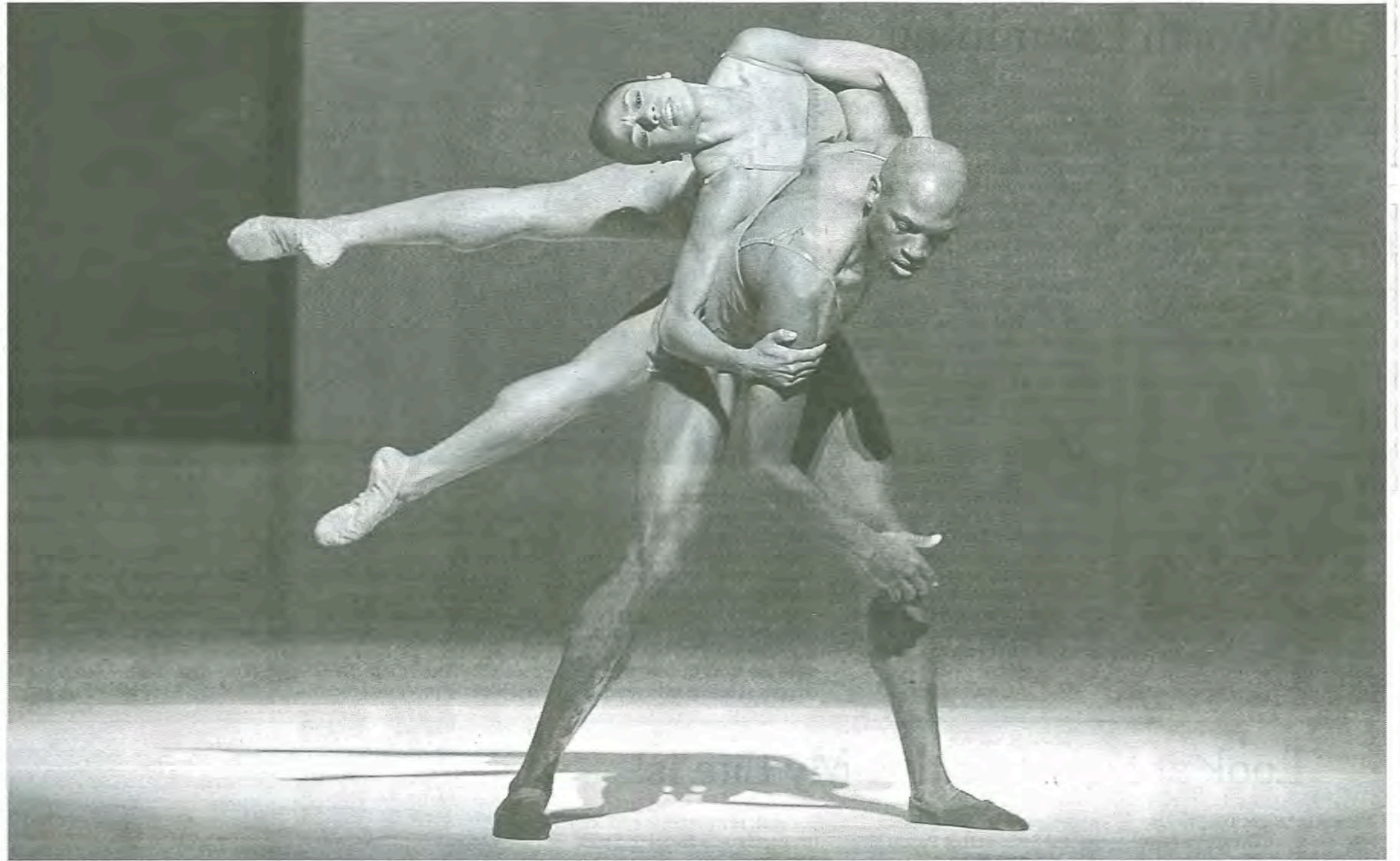
rebirth under the artistic direction of Robert Battle on Wednesday. While the Ailey company knows how to cater to audiences, a more gratifying truth has emerged: The dancers are also generous with choreographers. Life outside of "Revelations" is within their grasp.

Opening night at City Center showed both the company's future and its past: Wayne McGregor's "Chroma," a tensely kinetic work created in 2006 for the Royal Ballet, was followed by Ailey's 1960 masterpiece, "Revelations." During a midshow address, Mr. Battle spoke about how the audience looked beautiful but seemed unsettled by Mr. McGregor's dance: "I would have been shaken up, too, but I had an advantage." He held up a seatbelt.

Mr. Battle's loopy speeches, peppered with giggles and his crutch line, "Stay with me," are strangely compelling. (Is he funny or isn't he?) He was right to open the program with a bang. Without warning, the curtain parted on "Chroma," set in a white space with a portal at the back, designed by the architect John Pawson.

Jack White's harshly shimmering "Aluminum," one of several songs orchestrated or composed by Joby Talbot, propelled Antonio Douthit-Boyd and Linda Celeste Sims into risky, swooping lifts. Ms. Sims, pressed high in the air, arched her legs with such force that she could have landed in a backbend. Mr. McGregor has explained that his definition of "chroma" is "a freedom from

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



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Linda Celeste Sims and Antonio Douthit-Boyd performing in "Chroma," by the British choreographer Wayne McGregor, at City Center.

white." As such, the work is a visceral exploration of skin.

While the Ailey dancers lent tangible heat to the ballet, which included new costumes in tones of pink, lavender and tan — the original hues were more subdued — their interpretation was somehow less rooted in power than in vulnerability. At times, they needed more speed to mirror Mr. McGregor's rangy, skeletal dis-

tortions; the stark setting also exposed the knottiness of the partnering.

But watching the Ailey company grapple with Mr. McGregor's hyperextended articulations is fascinating. The set is like an echo chamber: Even though we can't hear the movement, we can see the way it reverberates beyond the body in skittish surges. Alicia Graf Mack, dancing with

Vernard J. Gilmore, pleats her impossibly long limbs like an otherworldly praying mantis, while Akua Noni Parker, a silky powerhouse, lurches and dips as if trying to ease an itch embedded deeply in her skin.

In the end, "Chroma" is more about interpretation than about content. Lucy Carter's cool lighting — often the best part about Mr. McGregor's work — shows

off his sinewy movement explorations, which accumulate but rarely grow. And, at this point, watching dancers walk onstage and off between sections with clipped, assertive steps is beyond hackneyed.

"Chroma" is still an auspicious addition to the Ailey repertory. Later, when "Revelations" was performed — to gorgeous, live music — the two dances bounced

off each other. For some reason, what rose to the surface in "Revelations" wasn't the joy but the pathos and, again, the struggle. The section "Sinner Man" was desperate rather than exuberant; the grief in Jamar Roberts's "I Wanna Be Ready" solo was harrowing, never maudlin. More than a question of contrast and compare with "Chroma," "Revelations" was reborn, too.