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DANCE REVIEW

New pieces rekindle amazing Ailey

By Allan Ulrich

The names and faces may change, the dances may vary, but a night at the Alvin Alley American Dance Theater guarantees you a night of amazing dancing. So, in that respect, no news is good news about the company, which opened its annual weeklong Cal Performances visit and residency Tuesday evening at Zellerbach Hall. Change, however, is in the air where choreography, often the weakest aspect of the Ailey experience, is concerned.

One can thank the troupe’s Robert Battle, the young dance maker who succeeded Judith Jamison as artistic director less than two years ago. Battle promised an infusion of new repertoire, and he has set about that task with a measure of sophistication. Pictured on Tuesday’s program, the first of four through Sunday, was Jiri Kylian’s “Petite Mort,” a 1991 only-kidding disclaimer on Mozart, courtship and the erotic impulse. The choreographer has been generous with the piece, and it

Sensuality, brawn in new choreography

their foils as foreplay, and the women tantalized with their mobile gowns struck a chord with this company.

Setting the slow movements of two Mozart piano concertos (recorded) seemed an act of daring 20 years ago, but as these couples melt into their pas de deux (stunning lighting by Joop Caboore), you could feel the tension between sound and vision.

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“Another Night” merits another viewing. Battle’s own choreographic contributions and the troupe’s less are two peas in a pod, and the two-leaping male protagonists to technical hurdles, which include tugging heads like rutting stags.

Dancers Renaldo Gardner and Michael Francis McElrath did the honors Tuesday. Battle’s more recent (“In/Out”) “In/Out,” a wrenching male solo to Nina Simone’s recording of “Wild Is the Wind,” is the sort of tour de force that gets a young choreographer and dancer noticed by the world.

Samuel Lee Roberts’ infinite stretch carried off honors.

All the troupe’s programs on this tour conclude with Ailey’s classic “Revelations,” its luster undimmed after 35 years. The company always rises to the challenge of this remembrance of religious fervor in the choreographer’s Texas boyhood. Tuesday, Linda Celeste Sims and Glenn Allen Sims ignited their “Fix Me, Jesus” duet, while it was a pleasure to catch former principal Matthew Rushing, joining the ensemble for “Wade in the Water.”

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