

Alvin Ailey Brings Joy to NYC
By Zita Allen – December 26, 2013



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Jamar Roberts in Aszure Barton's LIFT. (Paul Kolnik photo)

One of the most magnificent joys of the holiday season is the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's 2013 season at City Center in Midtown Manhattan. This thrilling five-week long season, with Artistic Director Robert Battle at the helm, features the extraordinarily talented dance company performing a repertory reflective of AAADT's trademark diversity.

Not too long ago, in a spacious, sun-drenched studio at the AAADT's Midtown Manhattan headquarters, 19 dancers rehearsed Aszure Barton's LIFT, a work commissioned by Battle. Skimming across the floor, unfurling a rapidly changing succession of patterns and groupings, the dancers gobbled up space with ravenous delight, unleashing a rapid-fire succession of kicks, turns, wobbly knees, and other moves that mirrored the percussive urgency of the edgy music.

In the center, towering over the dancers swirling about him, stood Jamar Roberts. Slowly, he moved in regal counterpoint to the energy surrounding him before being joined by the agile, charismatic Linda Celeste Sims for a unique off-center duet that was just one of the memorable moments of this excitingly quirky piece that is itself one of the many highlights of the AAADT's City Center 2013 season.



Andrew Eccles photo
Robert Battles

It's a season that features the premiers of Ronald K. Brown's spiritual blend of African and modern dance, "Four Corners," "Wayne McGregor's "Chroma" and Bill T. Jones "D-Man in the Waters," along with "Pas de Duke" and "The River," new productions of Ailey's homage to the great jazz composer, Duke Ellington. In addition, audiences will be treated to Ohad Naharin's brilliant "Minus 16," Jiri Kylian's "Petit Mort," Kyle Abraham's "Another Night," Ron K. Brown's "Grace" and, of course, the soul-stirring and uplifting "Revelations" among others.

This time, in order to fulfill the mission created by founder Alvin Ailey, Battle has presented a 2013 season that reflects the diversity Ailey has always demanded.

During a recent interview, I asked Robert Battle how he chose this season's repertory. "Once you pick one work," Battle said, "you start to fill in the place that take[s] you where you think you want to go ... What's wonderful about the Ailey company is the fact that one evening audiences may see MacGregor's futuristic "Chroma," which was made for England's classical Royal Ballet and has never been done by as modern dance company, and you'll see the dancers not only tackle it, but live in that work. Then, the same evening, you can also enjoy the Ailey masterpiece, "Revelations," which was created in 1958 and has a very different energy. That, to me, is at the heart of what I'm trying to achieve. These dancers can do it all. I think we should only be limited by the limits of our imaginations."



Paul Kolnik photo

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Jacqueline Green, Linda Celeste Sims, Kelly Robotham, and Belen Pereyra in Aszure Barton's LIFT

Nonetheless, for Battle, the works on an AAADT program, though very different, are connected. He says he chose "The River"—once performed by the American Ballet Theatre and featured Russian ballerina Natalia Makarova—and Ailey's jazzy "Pas de Duke" because, together, they "speak to Ailey's versatility."

Of course, "Pas de Duke" holds a special place in the company's history. It was created for AAADT's star Judith Jamison and the brilliant ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov. In it, Ailey fused ballet's sense of structure with jazz's seemingly

impromptu playfulness, creating a delightful competition. Talk about versatility and diversity. “It’s an excellent example of the range of Mr. Ailey’s work,” Battle says.

Dancer Jamar Roberts agrees, adding that the same is true for all of the AAADT repertory. Roberts—who can be seen in just about everything on this season’s program, from “Lift” and “Pas de Deux,” to Bill T’s “D-Man in the Waters” and Ron Brown’s “Grace,” as well as Alvin Ailey’s masterpiece “Revelations,”—says that’s the joy of dancing with the company he joined 12 years ago.

“I’ve had to be a little bit more on top of my game. It’s challenging. Every choreographer is so different that you have to constantly press the reset button so you can approach every piece differently. But, it’s all such a pleasure and a joy to do.”

It’s also such a pleasure and a joy to watch. See for yourself. Don’t miss the City Center 2013 Season of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.



Paul Kolnik photo

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
in Nill T. Jones's D-Man in the
Waters (Part 1)