

# The Star-Ledger

## Alvin Ailey dancers go for the glamour in Wayne McGregor's 'Chroma'

December 24, 2013 – By Robert Johnson

While seeking fresh challenges for his dancers and encouraging young choreographers, Robert Battle, the artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, also needs works that satisfy his audience's thirst for glamour.

But contemporary choreographers don't all make their dancers appear larger than life. In Bill T. Jones' "D-Man in the Waters," for instance, loose-hipped strollers who pause to give attitude only underscore this dance's lack of pretensions. Looking cool, even dressed in army surplus, is among life's free pleasures. Yet a sparkle that is not pedestrian runs through the Ailey repertoire. If anything is predictable about this company's current season at New York City Center, it's that the dancers look more beautiful than people on the street. Perhaps this is why Wayne

McGregor's "Chroma" fits the company so well. Ailey has imported works by European artists before, but "Chroma" is all about making a stunning impression — not just with frenzied movement, but also with handsome images chiseled in stillness. So while it may follow the trend set by dances such as Mauro Bigonzetti's "Festa Barocca" or Maurice Béjart's "Firebird," "Chroma" seems closer in some ways to Ailey's sizzling "Night Creature" or "Memoria," which revel in the dancers' elegance. McGregor doesn't shy away from striking a pose.



"Chroma" is flamboyant in the ways it frames beauty. John Pawson designed his stark, white set to make the varied tones of human flesh stand out, with a rectangular aperture like a second stage carved into the background. Joby Talbot's cinematic score suggests a high-speed car chase. When not in use, the dancers may stand facing the corner or lie on the ground. The sight of Jamar Roberts in a little black dress startles; as does Alicia Graf Mack's endless leg swooping in an arc from 9 o'clock to 5:30. Combine these provocations with the ducking, twisting hyperextensions typical of McGregor and the dance screams "Look at me!" Yet there is more to "Chroma" than its surface.

Early in the piece, Vernard J. Gilmore wanders through a sculptural group, pausing to wave as from a distance. When he comes face-to-face with Mack, the lights flash, silhouetting them. Then, without a word exchanged and without a touch, she follows him offstage. This encounter, foreshadowing their duet, suggests the way unspoken passions gird this seemingly abstract work. Moments when the dancers don't connect may resonate more profoundly than their entanglements. Akua Noni Parker seems to shiver with loneliness observed from afar; and when Antonio Douthit-Boyd turns and definitively strides away from Linda Celeste Sims, with whom he has been so aggressively engaged, the break feels devastating. McGregor's work demands the ferocious attack of eager movers such as Rachel McLaren; and hotshots in the second cast include Jeroboam Bozeman, Ghrai DeVore, Jacqueline Green and Daniel Harder.

As different as it is, "D-Man," too, gets under the skin when its boisterous athleticism gives way to complicated emotions. When Glenn A. Sims is mysteriously diverted from meeting Douthit-Boyd, viewers may shake their heads at the vagaries of fate. While set to a terrific score by Curtis Macdonald, this season's third premiere, Aszure Barton's "LIFT," runs out of movement ideas rather quickly.

### ***Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater***

*Where: New York City Center, 55th Street between Sixth and Seventh avenues, New York*

*When: Through Jan. 5.*

*Tuesdays through Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., Fridays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 2 and 8 p.m., Sundays at 3 and 7:30 p.m.*

*How much: \$25 to \$150; call (212) 581-1212 or visit [nycitycenter.org](http://nycitycenter.org).*