

FINANCIAL TIMES

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DANCE

Uprising

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, New York
★★★★☆

Apollinaire Scherr

The male dancers at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater are hardly asthmatic or middle-aged, but this past week, in a New York crowded with street protests, they only had to be tall and black to make audiences think of Eric Garner.

Hofesh Shechter's stunning *Uprising*, in its Ailey premiere this season, does not even try to distract us from such gloomy speculations. It is all about institutionally sanctioned violence.

Shechter's meteoric career took off in England but the choreographer grew up in Israel, where military service was compulsory. Though hardly a portrait of the Israel Defense Forces, the mordantly titled *Uprising* imagines the blur of hazing and herding, comradely love and sadism, which that brutal training might entail.

The 25-minute dance mixes rote

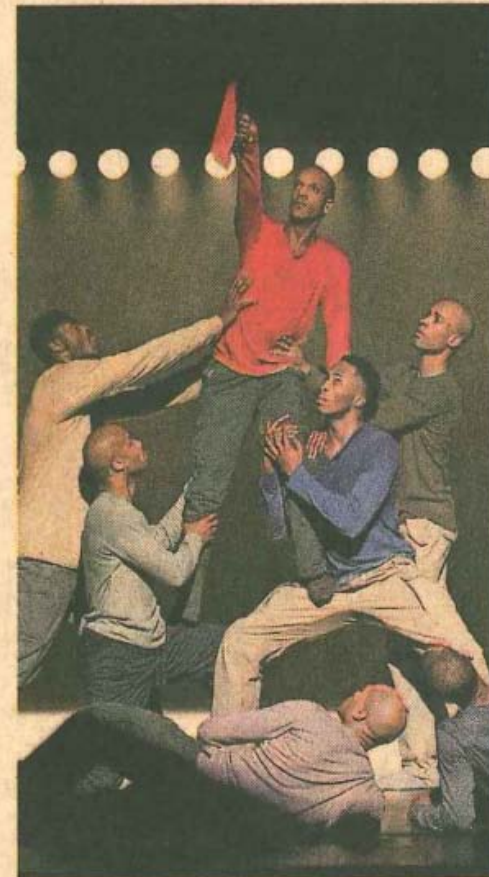
group action with wilful, idiosyncratic gesture. It oscillates between elusiveness and bluntness. It traverses tenderness, aggression and desperation as the percussive score peels the skin away from the ears.

The all-male piece begins when searchlights blaze on and seven men in a ragged row rush from the darkness to the lip of the stage, where they assume the beginner-ballet version of "At attention!": arms in a low wobbly circle, weight on one leg.

The focus shifts to a maddeningly attenuated struggle for dominance between statuesque Jamar Roberts and newcomer Jeroboam Bozeman that begins with a chokehold and ends with a dangerous embrace.

In *Uprising*, the itch to injure seems to grow under others' gaze and subside when the dancers are travelling close to the ground in a pack — heads down, legs bent double, arms bearing part of the body's weight like animals. The dancing becomes desperate when someone is trying to break free. There is nowhere to go but around and around.

The Ailey repertory tends to celebrate African-American life, not decry its persistent inequities. But it is good to have



Riding high: Hofesh Shechter's 'Uprising' proves timely — Paul Kolnik

dance that can absorb our shock and sorrow, especially for moments like this.

Until January 4, alvinailey.org