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Dance company extols freedom, makes us all believers

Energetic
storyline moves
us emotionally

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Alberta Ballet has worked for a long time to bring Ailey II, the young company of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, to Alberta and for good reason. This is a hard-working fun-to-watch group of budding athletic dance artists comprising some of the company's most promising scholarship students, and they thrilled their audience Thursday night at the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium.

REVIEW

Dance Review:
Ailey II 'Revelations'
Southern Alberta
Jubilee Auditorium
Feb. 20-22, 2014
(Four performances)

Founded 39 years ago and now carrying its own proud history, Ailey II was initially a "workshop company with 12 of the most promising dancers hand-picked from the Ailey School by Mr. Ailey himself," according to Troy Powell, the company's artistic director. Nowadays the company travels more often and carries a considerable reputation for offering these remarkable dancers the opportunity to secure their place in this world professionally.

There were three recent cho-

reographies on the program, including *The External Knot*, *We and Rusty*, all of which presented diverse facets of the company's collective abilities in modern movement and dance.

However, the piece many of us came to see was the company's signature show stopper *Revelations*, one of the most famously beautiful choreographies of all time. The work has transcended borders and become an acutely powerful, energetic extollation of freedom and a well-loved testimony to dance's timeless communicative power.

Divided into a three-panelled suite of 10 dances, *Pilgrim of sorrow*, *Take Me to the Water* and *Move, Members Move* trace the tale of redemption central to Alvin Ailey's vision of exodus from

slavery to freedom, all narrated in the rich musical language of inspired spirituals and close gospel harmonies.

The storyline is emotionally moving throughout, from the early dances of *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel* and in particular the passionate *Fix Me Jesus*, through to the glowingly famous final number *Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham*, which was repeated in part as an extended coda after the troupe received a standing ovation.

And the energy was unremitting, particularly in the work's central baptismal scene *Wade in the Water*, which was beautifully decorated with flowing tapestries symbolizing the River Jordan, where a young couple is baptized. The power of the baptismal

scene, the longest of the 10, gave architectural centrality to the suites, which took splendid form around this redemptive ritual, thanks not only to the music (arrangement by Howard A. Roberts of two excellent settings by the great folksinger and living treasure Ella Jenkins), but most of all to the dancers themselves who brought this off with a combination of unstinting velocity and fluidity. The natural flow into the solo *I Wanna be Ready*, my favourite, was perfect, with Gentry George's athleticism, grace, and flawless technique on show duly impressing in his depiction of a man of faith readying himself to pass from this world to the next.

Ailey II took us by storm, and by the time we left, they had made us all believers.