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## The Spiritual and the Social Mix at a Season-Opening Gala

There's always some risk when a dance company unveils a premiere, especially on gala night, when the crowd is full of donors. Will they like it? But that risk is

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**DANCE  
REVIEW**

lower when the choreographer is like an old friend of the company, with a knowledge of the dancers built up over years. Such is the case with Ronald K. Brown, whose new "Open Door" was the centerpiece of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's season-opening gala on Wednesday at City Center, sharing the program with David Parsons's "Caught" (1982) and the enduring "Revelations" (1960). This is Mr. Brown's sixth piece for the troupe (his first, "Grace," returns later in the five-week run). It's a pleasure to watch, if pleasure is sitting

*Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues performances through Jan. 3 at City Center, 131 West 55th Street, Manhattan; 212-581-1212, [alvinailey.org](http://alvinailey.org).*

back and relaxing as fit bodies breeze through physically demanding, musically intricate material, on this occasion catchy Latin jazz (Luis Demetrio, Arturo O'Farrill and Tito Puente). For someone who's seen Mr. Brown's work, which tends to repeat itself, it's predictable and enjoyable at the same time.

First, though, there were formal and informal remarks, from trustees and esteemed guests and the artistic director, Robert Battle, who has really finessed the art of the curtain speech in his four years on the job. His jokes were funny and his praise for his predecessors unforced. The evening honored BNY Mellon, a major funder of the troupe, with the actors Chadwick Boseman and Brandy Norwood serving as honorary chairman and chairwoman.

Mr. Boseman, a former student of Mr. Brown's, introduced "Open Door," which starts with a solo for the divine Linda Celeste Sims. Churning her arms around her body as if wrapping herself in



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Alvin Ailey From left, Akua Noni Parker, Rachael McLaren and Hope Boykin in "Open Door" at City Center.

fabric, she looked as invested as ever but had a softness that was less common for her. She marshaled more kick when joined by her equally sophisticated partner, Matthew Rushing (appearing as a guest artist), and eight other dancers. The atmosphere conjured by Mr. Brown's blended sources — Afro-Caribbean and Latin, spiritual and social — is never less than joyous, peaking with a very "West Side Story" mambo in which the women's full skirts (Keiko Voltaire's designs) get a lot of play.

The audience went wild for "Caught," in which strobe lights catch a soloist (the suave Michael Francis McBride on Wednesday) in midair. The wonders of this work fade with repeated viewings, in contrast to "Revelations," the Ailey gift that somehow keeps on giving, especially when accompanied by live music, a gala indulgence. With a choir of 24, the stage was crowded, but the dancing reflected that abundance.