

# The New York Times

June 13, 2015

## Hearing a Call, and Heeding It

When a choreographer creates a work for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, it can seem that only one option exists: try to make another “Revelations.”

**BRIAN SEIBERT**  
DANCE REVIEW

That, after all, is the signature work, the fail-safe masterpiece that closes nearly every performance. And although its representation of struggle and spiritual transcendence through dance has inspired many bad copies, it has also served as the model for many of the best pieces made for the troupe in recent years: Ronald K. Brown’s 1999 “Grace,” Rennie Harris’s 2011 “Home” — and now, Mr. Harris’s “Exodus.”

*Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performs through June 21 at the David H. Koch Theater, Lincoln Center; 212-496-0600, [alvinailey.org](http://alvinailey.org).*

During the premiere of “Exodus” at the David H. Koch Theater on Thursday, the Ailey dancers began in a dim fog, a pile of wretched sinners quaking in their suffering but also reaching for the heavens, resisting and submitting to the call of the spirit. A holy man walked among them (the majestic Jamar Roberts), healing with a laying on of hands. Strains of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” could be heard. By the end, having exchanged their street clothes for vestments of white, they were a united band, facing the light.

But Mr. Harris is a hip-hop artist, the most profound choreographer of that idiom. And so the soundtrack to his “Exodus” is house music, arranged and composed by Raphael Xavier. It takes quite a while for the beat to kick in, preceded by low thrums, moaning, chopped-up Nina Si-

mone and a gunshot, but once it does, “Exodus,” like “Home,” has the feeling of a late night in a club, with a D.J. cross-fading so that the dancing might never cease.

At first, the dancing breaks out only in bursts, like fits of possession. But what rich dancing it is, testifying through quick and intricate footwork. On Thursday, the applause when the beat locked in seemed to express not only appreciation but also relief, for “Exodus” is a challenging work from which the fog never really lifts. It follows the well-trodden path of “Revelations” while searching for an exit, and the somewhat inchoate result is compelling.

Along with a standard rendition of “Revelations,” Thursday’s program also included a new production of “Toccata,” a short excerpt from Talley Beatty’s 1960



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

**Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater** Members of the company in Talley Beatty’s “Toccata” on Thursday at the David H. Koch Theater.

“Come and Get the Beauty of It Hot.” More regular than “Exodus” in its crisscrossing of groups, “Toccata” is fatally burdened by an antiquated idiom. It looks pretty much like a bunch of across-the-floor exercises from a 1950s jazz dance class. The Ailey

dancers — naturals with Mr. Harris’s steps — looked merely sloppy in trying to stay loose with Mr. Beatty’s moves.

With Christopher Wheeldon’s “After the Rain Pas de Deux,” which entered the Ailey repertory in December, the problem

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*‘Exodus,’ a dance that seeks grace in unity, has its debut.*

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isn’t an old style but one tailor-made for a particular dancer: the New York City Ballet ballerina Wendy Whelan. Ailey’s Linda Celeste Sims hasn’t discovered how to make it her own.

The evening was also a tribute to Dudley Williams, the longest-serving Ailey company member, who died on June 3. Along with a tribute by Judith Jamison, who was holding back tears, he was honored with a performance of “A Song for You,” a solo that Ailey made for him in 1972, by no less than five men, including the sublime Matthew Rushing. Bigger-is-better is a misconception typical for this troupe, but the motivation is clear. The past looms large.