

March 31, 2016

## DANCE REVIEW

### A new day dawns for Ailey

By Allan Ulrich

Whatever you may say about Robert Battle's new "Awakening," you can be sure that it resembles little else in the repertoire of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which opened its annual Berkeley residency Tuesday,

**Jamar Roberts and Linda Celeste Sims of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in "A Case of You."**

March 29, at UC's Zellerbach Hall. That this is the first dance Battle has made for the company since he became artistic director five years ago may have something to do with it.

There seems a message here: The company could

*Ailey continues on E14*



Paul Kolnik



Paul Kolnik / Paul Kolnik

**Matthew Rushing and Linda Celeste Sims of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Ronald K. Brown's "Open Door."**

## Ailey troupe's new work unlike others

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prosper with its panoply of superlatively danced applause machines (such as Ronald K. Brown's "Open Door"), but the troupe's audiences might be seduced by something different. When the 12 dancers, all in Jon Taylor's white jerseys and trousers, are swept onstage and off as though blown by hurricane winds, and John Mackey's score whoops in your ear, you sense ritual in the air. These creatures roll, crawl and spin. They form patterns and one, Jamar Roberts, falls out. A circle of dancers surrounds him, and an enigmatic ending brings you up short.

They could be robots and a lone outlier. They could be inmates of an institution and an individual who has regained his sanity. And Battle admits a kinship with "Le sacre du printemps," but he possesses an original eye for patterning that could lead to great pieces, and he certainly is on the way here. The dancers huddle in masses, which dissolve before your eyes. There's a lyrical section that seems to mark time, but "Awakening," in its West Coast premiere, seemed full of promise. Al Crawford's lighting deserves a mention.

This first of three Cal Performance programs by the Alvin Ailey troupe was unique in featuring dances by all three of its artistic directors. Judith Jamison's "A Case of You" (2004) is a stunning duet, set to Diana Krall's recordings of three Joni Mitchell songs. When Jacqueline Green and the inexhaustible Roberts enter, unpredictability reigns. The pair toy with a red scarf, but from then on, we get a case of mutual attraction-repulsion working itself out. At one point, Green seemed to run up Roberts' standing leg and you wonder how she did it. Roberts remains the com-

**Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater:** Through 3 p.m., Sunday, April 3, Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley. \$18-\$96. (510) 642-9988, [www.calperformances.org](http://www.calperformances.org)

📺 To see "Open Door" by Ronald K. Brown: <https://vimeo.com/148547633>

pany's paragon of rugged lyricism. Green's toughness and vulnerability lingered in the mind.

The remainder of this program offered less satisfaction for veteran watchers of the troupe. Brown's "Open Door" came as one of the season's greater disappointments. In his previous works for the company, the choreographer took us on spiritual journeys, which at their best ("Grace") were transcendent expressions of religious belief.

None of that in "Open Door," a pedigreed and interminable suite of salsa dancing for 10 sleek performers headed by the ageless Matthew Rushing and the classy Linda Celeste Sims. The recorded score by Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra heralds lots of jutting arms, flouncing skirts and sultry looks. Roberts, Hope Boykin, Daniel Harder and firebrand Belen Pereyra helped to pass the time.

Ailey's "Revelations" (1960) closed the program as it does most of the company's evenings. The choreographer's memory of religious belief in his Texas boyhood will endure, but not because of what I saw Tuesday. Some of it approached the best, notably the "Fix Me, Jesus" duet in an intense rendering by Linda Celeste Sims and Glenn Allen Sims. Yet, the ensembles, Ailey's greatest inspiration, lacked spark and spontaneity.

*Allan Ulrich is The San Francisco Chronicle's dance correspondent.*