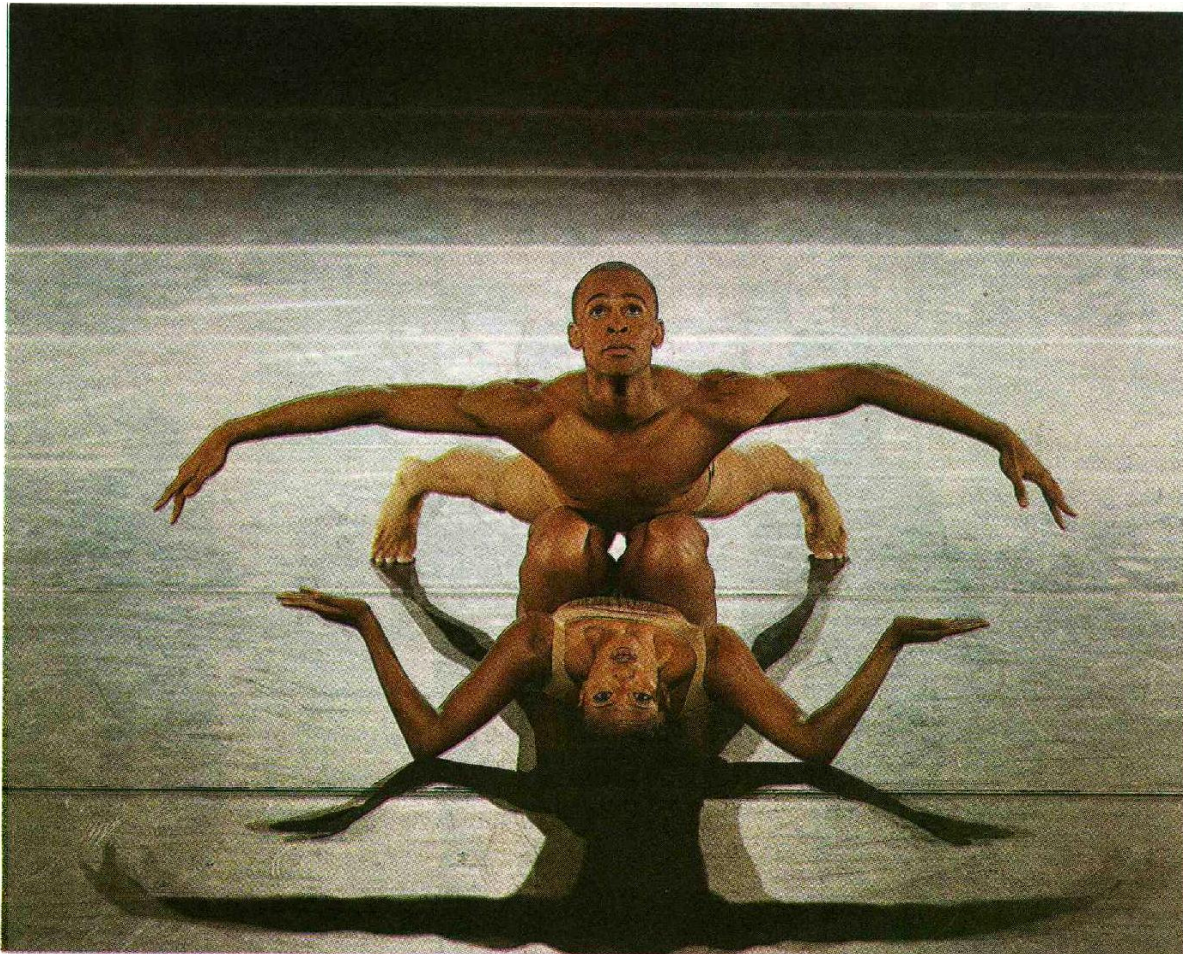


The Boston Globe

May 18, 2013



PAUL KOLNIK

Yannick Lebrun and Jacqueline Green in the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's performance of "Petite Mort."

A bold, diverse opening night for Alvin Ailey

By Karen Campbell
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Thursday night's concert by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater may have marked the opening of the company's 43rd annual Celebrity Series visit, but it was hardly business as usual. The first clue was the curtain speech by Robert Battle, finishing up his second year as the company's artistic director. In honor of the first responders, hundreds of whom filled the audience at the Celebrity Series's invitation, Battle spoke about dance's ability to heal.

"I believe dance is a manifestation and celebration of the tenacity of the human spirit," he

said.

The company's concert epitomized that vision with the boldest, most diverse program I've seen them present here in two decades.

The concert opened with "Another Night," the company's world premiere commission this season by Kyle Abraham, one of the hottest young choreographers in America. Set to a rendition of Dizzy Gillespie's landmark "A Night in Tunisia," by Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers, it's a dance party for 10 performers filled with colorful personalities — couples that flirt and tease, a seductive siren in blue (the gorgeously lithe yet intense-

ly focused Jacqueline Green), a quicksilver scamp (Daniel Harder) who baits the audience for more applause after a sassy solo. Abraham deftly integrates ballet, jazz, modern, street, and social dance, and he seems to delight in a play of contrasts — fast vs. slow, hard vs. soft, brittle angular shapes that melt into slow liquid extensions. Group sections feed off the primal energy of the percussion driven music with African-influenced squats and slides one moment, buoyant leaps and blistering pirouettes the next. Torsos undulate, arms slice or curl and coil backward, rotating almost out of their sockets. But despite some discrepan-

cies in timing and placement, the dancers make it all look like sheer fun.

Hometown boy Kirven James Boyd danced like a man bargaining with his demons in Battle's powerful, quixotic solo "In/Side." Fueled by Nina Simone's soulful rendition of "Wild is the Wind," Battle unleashes Boyd in a tour de force of skitters, quivers, high leaps, and crashing falls that contort him into anguished pretzel-like clenches, one hand reaching out in despair. Electricity seems to pulsate through Boyd, at times like a slow moving wave, at other moments like quick pulses that ripple in through one limb and out another.

DANCE REVIEW

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

At: Citi Wang Theatre, Thursday night. Performances continue, with changing programs, through Sunday.

er. At one point, Boyd unfurls a spin of what must be a dozen dizzying rotations before dropping full body to the floor in submission. It is a stunningly committed performance.

Jirí Kylián's classic "Petite Mort," to two luminous slow piano concerto movements by Mozart, is the first of the great Czech choreographer's works the company has learned, and while the style is a bit muscular, missing some of the breath in lifts and suspensions, it's an adventurous, welcome addition to the Ailey repertoire this season, from the swordplay of the opening men's dance to the women's duets with rolling dress forms, gliding behind the stiff dresses as if on wheels themselves. The performers are most persuasively showcased in Kylián's exquisite couples' partnering.

For the first time in memory, the company closed the opening night program not with the iconic Ailey classic "Revelations," but with another, albeit very different, crowd pleaser, Ohad Naharin's popular "Minus 16." This eclectic hodge-podge of a work to music ranging from a traditional Israeli anthem to a mambo gives the talented Ailey troupe room to show off some of their individual improvisational chops and break the "fourth wall" with the audience. While the company doesn't quite have the split second precision needed for some of Naharin's movement, especially the sharp-angled poses that release tension in a rubbery collapse, the energy is keen, and the audience doesn't seem to give a fig once the dancers fan out to pull a lucky few into a collective free for all and a calibrated cha cha. The enthusiastic blonde who played along to the bitter end nearly stole the show.

Karen Campbell can be reached at karencampbell4@rcn.com.