

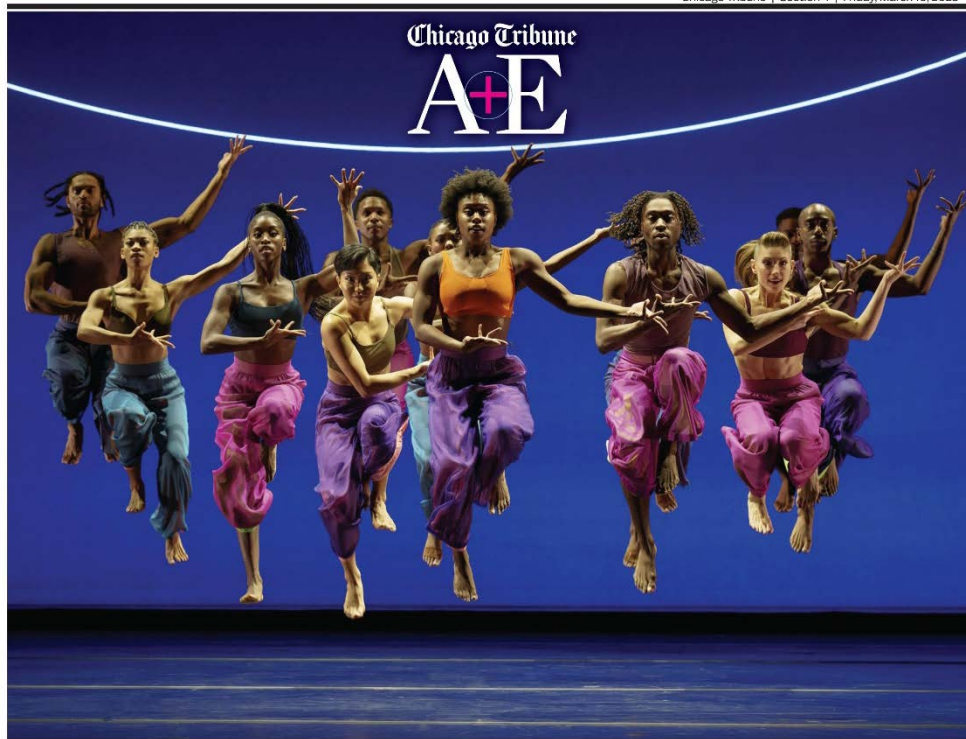
Chicago Tribune

[Review: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is back at the Auditorium, timely and timeless](#)

By: Lauren Warnecke

March 9, 2023 (Online: 3/7/23)

Chicago Tribune | Section 4 | Friday, March 10, 2023 1



Kyle Abraham's "Are You in Your Feelings?" is performed by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. PAUL KOLNIK

REVIEW ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER ★★★½

Timely and timeless

By Lauren Warnecke
For Chicago Tribune

A palpable buzz overtook the Auditorium Theatre Wednesday, with a who's who from the Chicago arts world arriving dressed to the nines for the 130-year-old venue's annual gala.

It so happened this was also the opening night performance of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's annual pilgrimage to Chicago, a tradition that stems back 55 years. Chicago is woven into the fabric of this New York-based company, with several dancers calling the Windy City home and the Auditorium as a habitual tour stop every year — every year but one, of course: 2021 was canceled due to the pandemic.

Continuing through Sunday in three different programs, the legendary troupe presents classic works from the company's past, folding in new-to-them repertory from late founder Alvin Ailey's peers and some of the leading voices in contemporary dance today. A few highlights include a revival of Twyla Tharp's "Roy's Joys," which Ailey adopted into its rep this season, performed Thursday and Saturday. Sunday boasts an all-Ailey program, while Friday's bill includes new works by Kyle Abraham and outgoing resident choreographer Jamar Roberts, plus a new-to-them remount of Paul Taylor's 1964 "DUET."

Wednesday's early evening show featured just three pieces, but in that brief, 90-minute morsel, Ailey



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater dancers Caroline Dartey and Ghrai DeVore Stokes in Kyle Abraham's "Are You in Your Feelings?" TONY POWELL

once again proved its timelessness and timeliness.

The night opened with Abraham's latest work, "Are You in Your Feelings?" Created in 2022 especially for the Ailey company, Abraham employs a time-bend-

ing playlist spinning the catalogs of luminary Black artists. Tracks are choppy pieced together, not appearing to play in any particular order, with The Flamingos' "I Only Have Eyes for You," on one end of the timeline and Summer Walker

and Kendrick Lamar on the other. In the middle: salient sounds of the '90s and early aughts surface with bits from Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu and Drake.

Turn to Dance, Page 4

Dance

from Page 1

It sounds wholly discombobulating, but “Are You in Your Feelings?” is a slow and largely understated burn. Big pops of color in Karen Young’s costumes, made iridescent under Dan Scully’s lighting, give a theatrical oomph to a piece that, by turns, feels nonchalant — apathetic even. To this, Abraham prescribes a befuddling mix of pedestrian gestures and classical ballet steps, with a base of silky-smooth undulations that are more quintessentially him. These percolations occasionally sizzle in satisfying ways, but the tone is decid-

edly internal — it’s a groove that doesn’t aim to wow.

Yet, wow it does in a few remarkable moments: The piece opens and closes with dancers Ashley Kaylynn Green and Chalvar Monteiro matched up. They playfully poke and prod at each other with gentle shoves to a shoulder or leg, moving the *pas de deux* along. Green forms the central character here, in what Abraham describes as “a celebration of Black culture, Black music and the youthful spirit that perseveres in us all.” Literal bits of the culture creep in, with references to hand jive and voguing, for example. That “Are You in Your Feelings?” throws B-side ballet steps into the mix — really, Kyle,

gargouillades?! — is perhaps his reminder that Black culture is not and never has been a universal experience.

After remarks from Auditorium CEO Rich Regan and Ailey artistic director Robert Battle, Jacquelin Harris and Kanji Segawa performed Battle’s bite-sized 2007 duet, “Unfold.” In his comments, Battle described the first time he heard Leontyne Price, the first African American opera singer to rise to international acclaim. “Unfold” is appropriately exasperated; Harris and Segawa contort their sinewy frames almost as if undergoing an exorcism. But this passion is tempered by tender moments for the couple; it’s a lot packed into

a very small space interpreting Gustave Charpentier’s famous aria from “Louise.”

This expedited performance (others throughout the weekend will be closer to two hours in length) ended, as all do, with Ailey’s iconic masterwork, “Revelations.”

In a way, “Revelations” is the 1960 vintage edition of Abraham’s “Are You in Your Feelings?” A mixtape of era-relevant gospel hymns, Ailey sought to represent Black culture and Black life through expressions of joy and hope. For the dancers, it is a convention of their daily lives as routine as brushing their teeth. In his 25 years in the company, Chicago native

Vernard Gilmore has performed this piece thousands of times. All the other times didn’t matter when he laid down at center-center, alone, in white pants and top for “I Want to Be Ready,” “Revelations’ ” unapologetically difficult display of technique and individual strength. If Gilmore’s not tired of this piece yet, neither am I.

Lauren Warnecke is a freelance critic.

When: Through March 12

Where: Auditorium Theatre, 50 E.

Ida B. Wells Drive

Running time: 2 hours

Tickets: \$63–\$133 at 312-341-2300 and auditoriumtheatre.org