

LIFE & STYLE

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Spoletto Festival USA

Rippling, powerful, spiritual ... unforgettable

By T.D. MOBLEY-MARTINEZ
Staff Writer

CHARLESTON

THERE AREN'T MANY names more respected in dance than the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. It got that way in its 45 years because of great modern dancers and an intuition for connecting with its audience on a visceral, emotional and yes, even spiritual basis.

All four works in this production (one of two programs the group performed at Spoletto during Memorial Day weekend) are so carefully visualized, you feel as if you're watching sculpture in movement.

That's no truer than in 1979's "Treading," in which dancer Dion Wilson moved on the empty stage, hitching and whipping his muscled body until Tina Monica Williams emerged from the darkness, posed perfectly behind him in a seamless figure of arms and legs and ripped torsos. Then the two moved together to an electronic score, their athleticism naked and raw and unabashedly powerful.

That's an Ailey trademark, of course: riveting dance paired with performers who can do the impossible with their highly trained bodies.

In 2003's "Heartsong," though, Alonzo King also explored a subtle emotional subtext in a series of vignettes. A moving soundtrack of Islamic devotional chants took dancers through the seemingly endless pairing and isolations of life. In one especially moving episode, two male dancers worked each other breathless — grabbing and leaning and falling and bending as if they were made of one coffee-colored piece of Silly Putty.

But the centerpiece of the two-plus-hour performance was the resurrection of "Revelations," which Ailey choreographed in 1960. Instead of the Cirque du Ailey of the beginning of the program, the dance and the music — gospel favorites even the atheist would recognize — coupled to create a more overt line of storytelling.

Powerhouse tunes such as "Wade in the Water" and "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" painted mini-narratives of pilgrimage, of redemption, of pain and social conscience. One of the best features Benoit-Swan Pouffer, who strained toward the salvation of God in "I Wanna Be Ready." The purity of his movements — of all the movements, really — haunt you.

Review



Alvin Ailey dancers
Bahiyah Sayyed-Gaines
and Glenn A. Sims



David Gordon

Some pick up and leave Pick Up show

By JEFFREY DAY
Staff Writer

Review

CHARLESTON

AT THE START OF THE David Gordon Pick Up Performance Company production, Gordon, a pudgy man with dense gray hair, wrote names of the works on a chalkboard.

At the end of the list, he scribbled, "NO CHAIRS."

"The Chairs" was to have premiered at Spoletto, but as Gordon explained to the audience a little later, the group ran out of money and time.

With this show of humor and humility, the company had the audience on its side, rooting for the five-member group performing "Couples," made up of three parts of other works.

The company betrayed the trust of the audience by giving about an hour of fine and intriguing material and half an hour of padding. By the last five minutes, which consisted of Gordon and his partner, Valda Setterfield, taking tiny steps toward the audience, it was hard to care about them or their chairs.

All started well enough with "Private Lives," during which Gordon and Setterfield, both around 60, moved boxes, suitcases and vacuum cleaners off the stage while discussing the most mundane daily chores. It was fascinating to watch art made of such simple material.

The other performers also engaged in dance and talk about buying a couch, what happens when a partner gets sick, the best time to get half-price food at the health-food place.

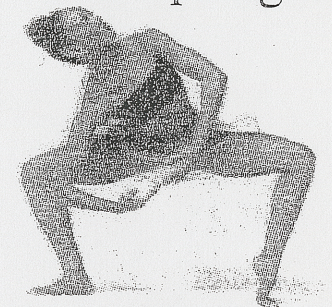
All this seemingly trite information reveals a great amount.

Moving into "Dancing Henry," the performance got away from the personal, with words from Shakespeare's "Henry V" and taped dialogue from movie versions of the play.

It was fun for a while, especially for those who know and love the play, but went on too long, as did the fragmented last work, "Family.COMedy," which ended with "The Long Walk." Several audience members did their own walk during this part — a proper response.

The company has finished its run.

In the spotlight



INSIDE

Spoletto Festival USA

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