



THELMA HILL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

A New Year With New Challenges and Renewed Promises



Greetings,

2022 finds us all in a similar place for better or worse as was the case in 2021. COVID is still very much with us and impacting all of our lives. In 2022 THPAC is planning to return to live audience performances for our annual June Dance Festival. The special theme for the season is RESILIENCE! We have all endured and overcome much since this pandemic began. This theme will offer dance

artists the chance to interpret what RESILIENCE has meant to them over the past 2 years or even earlier.

We have also begun production on *To The Souls Of Our Feet-A Film Documentary*. It will document the dance history of THPAC from its beginnings until the present. We are very excited about this film. We intend for it to shed light on the great programmatic history and the organizations' raison d'etre. Most of the footage for the film will come from THPAC's large film archive which stretches back to the early 80's. The film will also feature pop-up interviews from dance notables of the past and present. The film is set to be released in fall of 2023. Stay tuned.

Thank you,

Alex Smith, Jr.
Executive Chairman

We are looking for dance works for our June 2022 annual dance festival. If you fit into THPAC'S mission then we invite you to submit a short paragraph of the work to be presented (works in progress or new works). Cutting edge works are especially welcome. Thelmahill@msn.com

Help THPAC continue its mission to present and preserve dance culture of artists of color give at: www.thelmahill.org



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NEWS

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O&A NYC DANCE REVIEW: Ailey Presents Two Premieres Offering Hope



BY WALTER RUTLEDGE

The *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater* began their 2021 fall New York City season December 1 at New York City Center. The annual holiday season usually runs five weeks ending with a festive New Year's Eve finale. This highly anticipated return to live indoor performance (the first since 2019) offered the public an abridged three-week season. Unfortunately COVID19 forced the cancellation of the season after twelve performances.

The Company had planned to present a total of eighteen works over eighteen days. The ambitious fall offering includes seven works by founder Alvin Ailey, five from Robert Battle, four new productions and two premieres by Battle and the company's first resident choreographer Jamar Roberts. The recently retired company member, (Roberts last performance was during this season on December 9th) created a cathartic and holistic environment in the age of COVID designed to foster healing.

Robert's *Holding Space*, a twelve-member ensemble work, filled the space with what can be best described as "organized choreo-chaos". The dancers performed the same movement, but in different time signatures and at different angles. Slowly the dancers begin moving in individual patterns forming duets, trios, and small groups. The multiple patterns, happening simultaneously, heighten the tension and pushed the audience to visually dart from one group and configuration to another.

Eventually the dancers formed three lines (stage right, stage left and center) these linear progressions provided a modicum of order while allowing the dancers to maintain their movement individuality. One distinct image Roberts used effectively had dancers balanced on a forced arch with the pelvis dramatically thrust forward, giving the turns and extensions an off kilter

To The Souls Our Feet

A FILM DOCUMENTARY

A Dance History of Thelma Hill Performing Arts Center



COMING FALL 2023

look and a desolate feeling. Tim Hecker's harrowing score and the atmospheric lighting by Brandon Stirling Baker created an austere and sober otherworld.

A large square frame supported by four dancers (one at each corner) appears upstage left making the proceeding section the most thought provoking. Filled with arresting imagery the dancers one at a time entered the space inside the cube/isolation chamber; mirroring the isolation many people faced at the height of the pandemic.

The series of solos evolved into character studies portraying angst, aloneness and frustration. These emotions permeated the tight and expressive movement embellished by open mouths, outstretched arms and reaching hands. Personal and introspective these psychodramas recalled Ana Sokolow's *Rooms*, where inner city people living in proximity were still isolated and alone. Throughout, the raw and abandon movement was tempered by the dancer's incredible control.

The lights changed from a cool darkness to warm amber in the last section, while the dancers reprised the movement from the opening section. This time the choreography was performed in unison. The chaos was replaced by a meditative synchrony symbolizing the beginning of the end of despair.

Holding Space is an ambitious undertaking. The strong introspective elements produced a cerebral, "thinking man's" ballet. Roberts' efforts were admirable, but needed more contrast. The combination of dark lighting, musical monotony, nuanced movement and protracted length caused the work to meander.

One thing the company founder and its present artistic director have in common is an affinity for jazz music. Both artists understood/understand the fusion of function, form and style synonymous with jazz music and dance. From the beginning Ailey's portrayal of the African American experience was ac-

claimed for the works universal consciousness.

Blues Suite (1958), his first work for the then newly established Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, is a fusion of modern dance, ballet, jazz, black vernacular dance and non-verbal storytelling. From the down-home feel of *Backwaters Blues* to the symphonic power of Ellington, the poetry of Parker and the lyric longing of Jarrett; Ailey created dances that captured the majesty of this great American art form.

An American art form born and reared by former slaves and their descendants in the speakeasies and brothels of New Orleans Storyville District. Sadly, Storyville is another community where the people were displaced, and the community eased. (How wonderful would a revival Donald McKayle's *District Storyville* be?)

To commemorate his 10th anniversary as company artistic director Battle created *For Four* set to a jazz rendering by New Orleans native and jazz phenom Winton Marsalis. With classic Battle wit the quartet's title is derived from the composition's 4 x 4-time signature, but there is nothing "four square" about this work. Battle created a stylish and fun celebration marking our enthusiastic return to normality.

Fusing a multiplicity of style with strong dance theater elements this abstract narrative is a perfect vehicle to showcase his stellar cast. Renaldo Maurice opened and closed the work with a Master of Ceremonies whirling dervish aplomb; while Samantha Figgins executed a series of undulating fouetté inspired turns that oozed with liquid perfection. Jacqueline Green moved with such a total commitment that even her hair danced! And Solomon Dumas "do no wrong persona" wooed the audience the moment he walked on stage. In fact, the entire cast ricocheted through the energetic score with whimsical syncopated verve.