

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater review - *infectiously joyous*

The New York-based troupe are back at Sadler's Wells with transcendent works

By: Debra Craine

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★★★★☆



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is the great behemoth of American modern dance. Founded in the Fifties to "preserve the uniqueness of the African American cultural experience", the New York-based troupe has performed to 25 million people in 71 countries. And here they are, back at Sadler's Wells in London, with nine works spread over two programmes.

The visitors certainly got off to a great start with the first one, which focuses on new choreography (the second trumpets disappear, or begin again in the blink of an eye". The movement, delivered in small groupings, is brisk and well orchestrated, with a balletic grace (Walerski comes from a classical background), a muscular articulation and a thoughtful engagement with the music. The men, especially, shine here.

Jamar Roberts made *Song of the Anchorite* last year, a short solo - danced powerfully on opening night by Yannick Lebrun - about the passion of faith. But it was Lar Lubovitch's *Many Angels* (2024), with a heavenly vision of clouds as the backdrop, that really did the trick. This languid and uplifting piece is drenched in its music - the Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth Symphony- and unfolds five dancers in a love letter to dance that manages to avoid the clichés associated with "religious" choreography.

Physical intimacy is showcased in Judith Jamison's *A Case of You*, 20 years old but now in a new production. Diana Krall sings Joni Mitchell's title song as the close-knit choreography

Both programmes end with Ailey's 1960 masterpiece *Revelations*. Inspired by his southern Baptist upbringing in rural Texas in the 1930s, Ailey's danced prayer sets dazzling, heartfelt choreography to traditional spirituals and gospel songs as it explores the struggle of black Americans against racism and poverty, and the comfort of their faith.

It's profoundly affecting, transcendentally danced - the male trio to Sinner Man is jaw-dropping, thanks to Sebastian Garcia, Isaiah Day and Patrick Coker- and infectiously joyous. No wonder it's the most performed modern dance in American history. It works every time.

