Modern Dance Finds An Unexpected Home

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August 24, 2019

TV? It was Horton, a choreographer and teacher who died in 1953, who inspired Alvin
Alley to dance after Alley's friend, Carmen de Lavallade, convinced him to take a class
in Los Angeles. One reason the world has
"Revelations," Alley's 1960 masterpiece, is
because of Lester Horton.
And when an episode of a network show
ends with a quote by Alley, I perk up: "I am
trying to show the world that we are all hu-
man beings and that color is not important,
the title card reads. "What is important is
the quality of our work." It lingers onscreen
long enough for the words to be absorbed.
"Pose" is a container of specific dance his-
tories; it's telling that the Horton technique,
part of the modern dance tradition, is the
one that "Pose" is showing to the world.
The guiding force behind that impulse is Tracy
Inman, the show's modern dance choreo-
grapher and consultant, who is also a direc-
tor of the Ailey School — the show's fictional
academy is based on the school and shot
there — as well as an alumnus of Alvin Alley
American Dance Theater.
And here's what the choreography on
"Pose" has nothing to do with: the nebulous
contemporary or lyrical dance styles found
on shows like "So You Think You Can
Dance." As Mr. Inman put in a recent inter-
view, "Kick, spin, jump, grab your mouth,
look surprised, the demons are after you.
You're in love. It drives me insane."
At first, he said, the show's approach to
modern dance was going to be along the
lines of Martha Graham. "When they en-
gaged me I said: 'Graham's not my forte —
I understand Graham and I do it, but I teach
Horton,'" Mr. Inman said.
With the Graham technique, movement is
initiated from the pelvis; it can be difficult
for male dancers, who generally have less
flexibility in their hips than women. Horton

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'Pose,' a series on FX, goes well beyond
vogueing and runway.

THE DANCE WORLD doesn't always
escape the land of television with-
out a bruise or two. The camera
loves nothing more than a bloody
mash-up. And then there's "Pose" on
FX. This look at the ballroom scene in New York City is equal
d parts grit and glamour. Its horrifying
moments don't have anything
to do with perpetuating ster-
estypes about a dancer's pain, but
with the brutality of AIDS, which
devastated the dance community.
The message of "Pose," which
begins in the late 1980s, is not
about style, as you might think,
but about integrity and persis-
tence. It gets at the essence of
dance. How do you make some-
thing out of nothing? You use
what is distinctly your own. The
body. Imagination. And for many
of the "Pose" characters, that's all
they have.

While the acting and writing
can be uneven, the show has an
undeniable commitment to dance
that is present even when the
characters aren't performing or
rehearsing, just talking and
laughing and crying. "Pose" is
something of a peek into the
private lives of dancers, in which
the rigor is the same for all — it
doesn't matter if their work is done in
a studio, on a stage or on the pier.
The dancing, at times, is spec-
tacular, particularly that of
couger Jason A. Rodriguez,
known as Slim Ninja: Radiating
limbs transform his torso into a
solid stretch of sinew and muscle,
making him at once tense, velvety
and effortless.

But the most unexpected part
of this series, which features chro-
ography by Leiomy Maldonado
(vogueing) and Twigg Pucci
Garanon (runway), is its modern
dance bent. How often do you hear
references to Lester Horton on
the show?

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modern dance, uses the entire body; it's part of what
makes an Alley man so distinct.
"It's really dynamic in terms of your abil-
i ty to explore all these different lines — geo-
metric shapes, pivotal points in your body," Mr. Inman said. "You can take any move-
ment and make it a turn. It flows like crazy if
makes for really strong, long lean bodies." All
of that is evident in the graduation per-
formance of Damon (Ryan Jamaal Swain),
who performs in the concert and runway
works. At graduation he dances a solo, cre-
ated by Mr. Inman, set to "Didn't My Lord
Deliver Daniel," music that Aliley used for a
prayerful trio in "Revelations." (Coin-
cidentally, Billy Porter, who plays Pray
Tell on "Pose," is one of the soloists on that
recording of "Revelations" that the Aliley
company uses for performances.)

The choreography for Damon's solo
comes from "Dreamscape," an older work
by Mr. Inman, and it's loaded with athlet-
icism and sweep. "There's Horton, Graham,
a little Aliley, floor stuff, turns, jumps —
ev-verything," he said. "It's really complicated,
difficult movement and stamina-wise, it's
brutal!"

In another solo choreographed by Mr. In-
man, part of the same graduation perfor-
amance, a dancer — Fana Tesfagorgis, a for-
er member of the Aliley company — rolls
on the floor and rises while rocking in place;
one hip juts out as her arms bend like the
legs of an insect.

In the audience, Elektra Abundance, the
haughty queen of the ballroom community,
hisses: "What are those moves? She looks
like a pigeon with a busted foot."

And that's just right, too. Modern dance
can require a hefty learning curve. It can be
easy to make jokes about: "Pose" is giving it
space.