

THE STAYING INSIDE GUIDE—DANCE

'Revelations' for Trying Times

Ailey All Access offers streaming dance programs, including a recording of the company's iconic creation

By ROBERT GRESKOVIC

SINCE 2013, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has appeared annually at Lincoln Center's David H. Koch Theater. This year is the exception, somewhat. As part of its Ailey All Access series of online presentations, begun March 30 in the wake of the pandemic, the troupe has been working on ways to still offer a June season of a sort.

Before the theater shutdown, live performances had been scheduled for June 10 to 14. Instead, starting this Thursday at 8 p.m. EDT, viewers at home will be able to stream a four-part mixed bill performed on the Koch stage, that was filmed in 2015 and previously shown in movie houses. It will remain accessible internationally via streaming for a week, and in the States for a longer, indefinite period. Later, on June 11 at 7:30 p.m., the troupe's Ailey Spirit Gala will stream and be available for a week.

While the quadruple bill can also be purchased on DVD and Blu-ray, the streaming premiere, which is free on the Ailey All Access site as well as on the Lincoln Center at Home website, also includes a recently made featurette that has several talking heads introducing the program's capstone: the internationally popular and audience-pleasing "Revelations," choreographed in 1960 by Ailey—who died in 1989 at age 58—and part of nearly all of the troupe's mixed bills since that dance's premiere. The seven-minute intro includes clips from a 1978 interview of Ailey by Harry Belafonte but omits a telling exchange about "Revelations" in which Mr. Belafonte wonders if Ailey knew in 1960 that he'd "be doing it forever." Mr. Belafonte asks, "does it bother you?"—to which Ailey, speaking like an artist aiming to move on, creating new works, forthrightly says, "in a way it does." But he then ruminates about recently seeing his then 18-year-old dance on tour in Atlanta,



Ailey dancers perform separately but together in a short film inspired by the finale of Alvin Ailey's 'Revelations,' above; a scene from 'Revelations,' below

noting confidently that "it still worked!"

And work it continues to do. "Revelations" was previously streamed, for a week, to kick off Ailey All Access. This June airing of the 30-minute work will have more longevity.



The gracefully filmed performance of the 10-part dance set to traditional spirituals, which caps the bill, opens with a luminous rendering of "I Been 'Buked," in which the camera aptly fixes on the distinct use Ailey often made of his dancers' outspread hands. In the center of the segment's climactic, wedge-like grouping of six women and three men, sleek and handsome Yannick Lebrun is a quietly poetic presence.

Willowy guest artist Alicia Graf Mack, costumed in Ves Harper's flounced, summery white dress, appears in the "Take Me to the Water" section, through which she skims and strides fleetly and ecstatically (the clear blue lighting is by Nicola Cernovitch) while holding aloft a large, jellyfish-like parasol. Later in "Move, Members, Move," dressed in buttery yellows and brandishing a hand fan, Ms. Mack joins her 10 sister dancers, who eventually pair up with nattily dressed male partners for "Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham," the suite's rousing finale, which covers the stage with animation so infectious it typically elicits rhythmic clapping and seated "dancing" from its happy audience.

None of the works that precede "Revelations" on the bill are by Ailey, and only one is of more than passing interest. Ronald K. Brown's impassioned 28-minute "Grace" (1999) reveals an engaging blend of modern dance and West African moves unleashed by an impressive cast of five women and six men, to a six-track mix of songs bookended by Duke Ellington's "Come Sunday."

Wayne McGregor's 22-minute "Chroma" (2006), with a fashion-shoot setting by John Pawson and

mostly throbbing music by Jack White and Joby Talbot, features 10 hardworking dancers executing monotonous lengths of contorted athletic moves. Ailey Artistic Director Robert Battle also included his three-minute "Takademe" (1999) here, which plays out in a winning performance by statuesque Jamar Roberts as a frequently knotty doodle taking quirky cues from Sheila Chandra's Indian Kathak-inspired vocalizing.

The June 11 Ailey Spirit Gala is still being put together with the participation of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater dancers and members of the troupe's junior company, Ailey II, plus talented students from Ailey Camp and other "special guest appearances." In what promises to be a now-familiar array of Zoom-like short films featuring today's dancers, individual efforts will pay tribute to "Revelations." If the talking heads in the introductory footage to the 2015 film are any indication, having something fresh and insightful to offer about the 1960 masterpiece isn't easy; having the work itself accessible online should be all the testament any viewer really needs.