Unfold
Choreography: Robert Battle
Restaged: Kanji Segawa
Music: Leontyne Price
Costume Design: Jon Taylor
Lighting Design: Lynda Erbs

Set to Leontyne Price’s intensely romantic recording of Gustave Charpentier’s aria about the first day of love, Robert Battle’s striking pas de deux, Unfold, is one of four ballets that he set on the Company prior to becoming Artistic Director in 2011. With its fluid grace, this gem exemplifies Battle’s skill for nuanced gesture and vivid imagery. The divinity Battle feels in the aria is invoked in the choreography for what he believes to be a common goal: “What every artist reaches for is beyond human, but that it is human is what makes it spectacular.”

The ballet started with Battle’s ultimate inspiration: music. “[I’ve] always thought the aria is close to the divine,” he says. Battle’s dramatic manifestation of the extreme nature of Price’s soprano is reflected in the forceful nature of the choreography. Flowing arms and smooth transitions intertwine with halted staccato movements and severe body positions that twist, stretch and extend the dancing body into unusual and remarkable positions.

Designed to capture the intensity of one’s first love, what Battle describes as “that feeling that life stands still,” the drama inherent in the piece is accentuated by the innovative approach to the romantic pas de deux. While the lovers are onstage together, they rarely look at each other. Rather than have the dancers swooning, Battle sought to translate the connection between the lovers by asking himself how weightlessness would feel. The answer is found in the mutual feeling of uncertainty about first love, and the connectedness is found in the sense that “we’ve never been here [before].”

“A breathtaking, highly unusual duet.”
Chicago Sun-Times

“A highly original duet, mixing classic romanticism and odd, startling twists.”
Chicago Tribune
Robert Battle

Robert Battle became artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in July 2011 after being personally selected by Judith Jamison, making him only the third person to head the Company since it was founded in 1958. Mr. Battle has a long-standing association with the Ailey organization. A frequent choreographer and artist-in-residence at Ailey since 1999, he has set many of his works on Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II, and at The Ailey School. The Company’s repertory includes his ballets Ella, For Four, Juba, The Hunt, In/Side, No Longer Silent, Mass, and Takademe.

In addition to expanding the Ailey repertory with works by artists as diverse as Kyle Abraham, Aszure Barton, Ronald K. Brown, Christopher Wheeldon, Rennie Harris, Hofesh Schechter, Jiří Kylián, Wayne McGregor, Robert Moses, Ohad Naharin, and Paul Taylor, Mr. Battle has also instituted the New Directions Choreography Lab to help develop the next generation of choreographers. Mr. Battle’s journey to the top of the modern dance world began in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami, Florida. He showed artistic talent early and studied dance at a high school arts magnet program before moving on to Miami’s New World School of the Arts, under the direction of Daniel Lewis and Gerri Houlihan, and finally to the dance program at The Juilliard School, under the direction of Benjamin Harkarvy, where he met his mentor, Carolyn Adams. He danced with the Parsons Dance Company from 1994 to 2001, and also set his choreography on that company starting in 1998. Mr. Battle then founded his own BattleWorks Dance Company, which made its debut in 2002 in Düsseldorf, Germany, as the U.S. representative to the World Dance Alliance’s Global Assembly. Battleworks subsequently performed extensively at venues including The Joyce Theater, Dance Theater Workshop, American Dance Festival, and Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival.

Mr. Battle is a recipient of the prestigious 2021 Dance Magazine award. He was honored as one of the “Masters of African-American Choreography” by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2005, and he received the prestigious Statue Award from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA in 2007. In 2014, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of the Arts and visited the White House to accept from President Obama, on behalf of Alvin Ailey, the National Medal of Freedom – the nation’s highest civilian honor. Mr. Battle was named a 2015 Visiting Fellow for The Art of Change, an initiative by the Ford Foundation. In October 2015, Simon & Schuster published MY STORY, MY DANCE: Robert Battle’s Journey to Alvin Ailey, an inspiring children’s book based on Mr. Battle’s life. He is a sought-after keynote speaker and has addressed a number of high-profile organizations, including the United Nations Leaders Programme and the UNICEF Senior Leadership Development Programme.

Unfold

Music Credit Information

Louise, Act III, “Dupuis Le Jour” performed by Leontyne Price, composed by Gustave Chapentier, courtesy of SONY BMG MASTERWORKS by arrangement with SONY BMG MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT