The River

Choreography: Alvin Ailey
Restaged by Matthew Rushing, Ronni Favors & Clifton Brown
Original Score: Duke Ellington
Original Music Coordination: Martha Johnson
Original Costumes: A. Christina Giannini
Lighting Design: Chenault Spence

“...of birth...of the well-spring of life...of reaffirmation...of the heavenly anticipation of rebirth...” – Duke Ellington

The River is Alvin Ailey’s acclaimed composition with the late musical genius Duke Ellington, choreographed and composed in 1970 for American Ballet Theatre and first performed by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1981. One of over a dozen dances Ailey created to Ellington’s music, The River was Ellington’s first symphonic score written specifically for dance and represented a major collaboration between two great American artists. Combining classical ballet, modern dance and jazz, Ailey’s allegory of birth, life and rebirth abounds with water references, from the spinning “Vortex” solo to the romantic “Lake” duet. The grandeur of the dancing in this full-company ballet is matched by the music in a suite that suggests tumbling rapids and slow currents on its voyage to the great sea, mirroring the journey of life. The River has been restaged by Associate Artistic Director Masazumi Chaya for several companies in addition to this latest production for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which also features costumes newly designed for the first time since the 1970’s.

“The River is most telling in what it suggests about Ailey as a choreographer... He knew his classical ballet and his admiration for it is clear in this suite of dances that suggests the flowing, roiling push of water... The River is lyrical, hard-charging and funny in turn, with ample opportunities for individual dancers.”

The New York Times

“The River triumphs as luminous theater...in its savvy arrangements evoking the fluency and sparkle of bodies of water ...floods the stage with a freshness and visual distinction all its own.”

The Wall Street Journal

“The River [is] Ailey at his best, a piece ambitiously structured and wonderfully dynamic... The choreography flows from cool blue to red hot, an adventure in momentum... The company shines.”

The Times [London]

Duke Ellington

Born in Washington, D.C. in 1899, composer, pianist and band-leader Duke Ellington was one of the most influential figures in the history of music. In the early 1930’s his band established its fame at the Cotton Club in New York City, with a sound Ellington called “American Music” rather than jazz. In his fifty-year career, the “Duke” played over 20,000 performances in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East as well as Asia, and is best remembered for the over 3,000 songs that he composed before his death in 1974, including It Don’t Mean a Thing if It Ain’t Got That Swing, Sophisticated Lady, Mood Indigo, Solitude and Satin Doll. Ellington’s popular compositions set the bar for generations of jazz, pop, theatre and soundtrack composers to come.
The original Ailey production of The River was made possible, in part, with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, a State agency, and by a grant from The Ford Foundation.

*The River*

Music Credit Information

**Music**: *The River*
- Movement I: Spring
- Movement II: Meander
- Movement III: Giggling Rapids
- Movement IV: Lake
- Movement V: Falls
- Movement VI: Vortex
- Movement VII: Riba (Mainstream)
- Movement VIII: Twin Cities

Composed by: Duke Ellington
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