

BAMbil May 2009

Contents

Ailey's Masazumi Chaya

AAADT's Associate Artistic Director keeps the repertory sharp 12 by Susan Yung



Matthew Rushing, Renee Robinson, Constance Stamatiou in Alvin Ailey's Revelations. Photo: Nan Melville

Upcoming Events



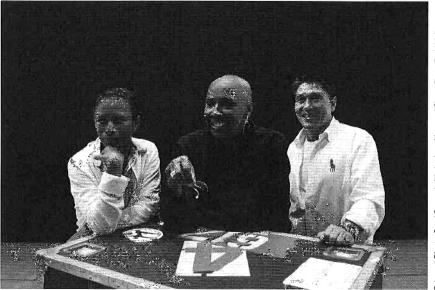
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at BAM

Presented by Alvin Alley American Dance Theater Program A: Best Of

Jun 9, 11 & 13 at 7:30pm; Jun 13 at 2pm Program B: Classic Ailey

Jun 10, 12, & 14 at 7:30pm; Jun 14 at 3pm Judith Jamison, Artistic Director Masazumi Chaya, Associate Artistic Director

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



Masazumi Chaya: Keeper of the Flame

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater returns to BAM June 9—14 for its second consecutive summer run in Brooklyn. It's a logical complement to the company's annual month-long December residence at New York City Center, when crowds take in Ailey shows as part of holiday celebrations and long-standing tradition. Two programs will rotate—"Classic Ailey" and "Best Of."

Associate Artistic Director Masazumi Chaya recently reflected on the company's return to BAM, where he performed with the company, which he joined in 1972 and danced with for fifteen years. "It was wonderful last June at BAM. There were so many types of people there—young faces, old... I got the sense that watching dance performances is an Important part of their lives," he said.

Watching dance performances is certainly an important part of Chaya's position with AAADT, which he's now held for eighteen years. In fact, in advance of their New York seasons, he can be conducting and watching rehearsals for up to seven hours straight each day—not to mention performances.

Chaya, who has restaged dozens of Ailey dances, discussed whether he goes by mernory or employs video in the process. "We use both. But I talk to the dancers a lot, tell them stories about working on this or that dance with Mr. Ailey. Sometimes I talk too much—20 minutes!" He oversaw the restaging of excerpts of Ailey's *Phases*, *Landscape*, *For Bird—With Love*, *Caverna Magica*, and *Opus McShann*, plus *Blues Suite* and *Revelations* in their entirety, which comprise the "Classic Ailey" program.

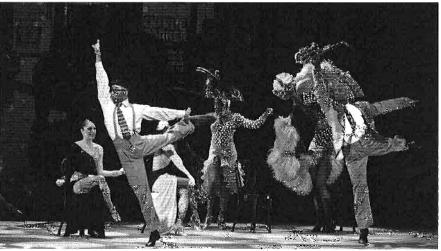
Matthew Rushing, one of the company's veteran stars, shared his thoughts on Chaya's restaging method. "In order to maintain the integrity of the piece, he reviews tapes of the work when it was first choreographed—not just when it was last performed. Then he sets the original version on the current dancers of the company. One of the most impressive things is that he learns all the roles by himself before he shares the full information with each individual artist—male or female."

Artistic Director Judith Jamison's *Hymn* and George Faison's *Suite Otis* (1971) are featured on the "Best Of" orogram, "George Faison came in and worked with the dancers to make it fresh. There wil"

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

be a different cast every night," said Chaya. For *Hymn* (1993), actor/playwright Anna Deveare Smith conceived, wrote, and narrated (and will narrate this year) recollections from the company's dancers. The original stories are performed by the cast, new with the exception of Renee Robinson, who has been a member of AAADT since 1981.

Revelations (1960) will be performed each night. Chaya talks about how he keeps this monument of dance current after thousands of performances, a difficult task even given sublime choreography. "I change the cast around all the time, so a dancer can dance a different section from night to night. There are many people who help me prepare it. Ms. Jamison provides intensive insight on the feel and



or 'Bird' With Love, Bird - Matth

detail of the move ent. We can spend sometimes two hours just working on the fan section for the women, to get it just right—things like the wave when she entels. And sometimes it's a young dancer playing an older woman, so we work with her on that."

Constance Stamatiou joined the company in 2007. "It's been wonderful to learn and perform Alvin Ailey's works, such as *Blues Suite*, *Revelations*, *Ailey Classics*, and *Highlights* (excerpts)," she says. "Chaya, our Associate Artistic Director, has not only taught us steps but the history behind each piece. He is very clear with passing down notes and information that he was given from Alvin. I enjoy learning Mr. Ailey's work and seeing Chaya reminiscing, telling us stories about Alvin, his reasons behind creating his pieces and even about previous dancers. It's inspiring; it's moving."

Rushing noted, "He takes Mr. Ailey's works very seriously. He wants us to stay true to the movement—and true to Mr. Ailey's vision for the piece. In the new production of Alvin Ailey's *Blues Suite*, it was a privilege to learn the "clown" role from Mr. Chaya, as it was a part he had originally performed."

Chaya obviously relishes his current role with the company, discussing his favorite responsibility: "When I am watching a performance and I see a dancer do something I'd never seen before. We make so many mistakes in rehearsal, but when the curtain goes up, they really perform wonderfully. People tell me, you work so hard, but it's not work! The dancers do the work."

Most likely he's observing an enduring lesson he learned from Ailey. "He always told me, 'dance my steps, but express yourself." And so continues the choreographer's legacy and steps—in good hands.

—Susan Yung