

## Ailey II dance troupe to spend week in KC

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By ANN SPIVAK

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Often dubbed “the future of modern dance,” Ailey II comes to town this week with one goal in mind — exposure.

“It’s all about us exposing people to the arts and exposing them to the history of the Ailey organization,” said Sylvia Waters, long-time artistic director (and beloved mother figure) of Ailey II — 12 young dancers who make up the junior troupe of the famed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York.

“These dancers are providing audiences with some of the best dance in America and some of the most exciting choreographers in America,” she said. “And we’re making it accessible to all age levels and to all ranges of people, even those who might not necessarily come to dance or appreciate dance.”

Although the main Ailey company recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, Ailey II is younger, founded in the mid-’70s to give apprentice dancers a transition between the classroom and the stage.

But in recent years, Ailey II has become a renowned dance group in its own right, winning rave reviews and garnering dance awards and honors nationwide. In Kansas City, Ailey II will perform four shows Thursday through Sunday at the Folly Theater.

Ailey II’s new fall season features a North African-inspired piece paired with a pulsating percussion score called “Divining” by Ailey’s artistic director Judith Jamison. There’s also a new work with Brazilian roots, “Proximity” by Carlos dos Santos.

Tyrone Aiken, executive director of the Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey, said Ailey is known for performances that have great energy and spirit.

“If you like something classical, you’re going to get it,” he said. “If you like post-modern, you’re going to find it, too. And then there’s traditional jazz, and there’s something hip-hop. That’s the wonderful thing about the dancers, their ability to respond to different styles.”

Because Kansas City is Ailey’s second home, the dancers will be in town a full week instead of their usual one-night stands across the country. Since the mid-’80s, the Ailey company and Ailey II have alternated years performing in Kansas City.

“Kansas City is the only place where we have this in-depth relationship and where we have all this interaction with the schools, performing for children and holding workshops where they get to learn how to move and they get to meet and talk with the dancers,” Waters said.

“This is really a treat for us, and we have a tremendous time when we’re in Kansas City,” she said. “The response is so overwhelmingly warm, I can’t even find the right words to describe it.”

Most Ailey II company members go on to pursue careers as dancers, teachers and choreographers with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, other dance companies, on Broadway or in schools, Waters said.

“What’s most exciting about Ailey II is that you’re seeing gifted dancers and gifted choreographers who are just starting their careers,” Waters said. “They are so enthusiastic and so excited about bringing their work to the audience.”

Highlights of the company’s four formal programs here include George Faison’s “Movin’ On,” a celebration of jazz. Faison was a dancer with the Ailey Company and a choreographer for “The Wiz” on Broadway. The setting for “Movin’ On” is a nightclub, with dancers playing music and dancing the night away.

Another piece is called “Echoes,” by choreographer Thang Dao, inspired by his family’s history in Vietnam. The ballet piece echoes his mother’s memories as the dancers move around the stage and seem to lift each other up as the dance progresses and the unity of the group unveils itself.

“There’s so much diversity in the repertoire,” Aiken said. “In terms of modern dance, it’s not a singular dance, it’s the voice of America.”