

# The Star-Ledger

## 'Ailey II': Second company, primary force

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By Robert Johnson

**NEW YORK** — Imagine challenging a young dancer to hold the stage, alone, for 11 minutes.

Sylvia Waters, the founding artistic director of Ailey II, is fearless pushing her charges — which is one reason why this company is so exciting.

The troupe opened a two-week season last week at the Ailey Citigroup Theater.

The point of Ailey II is to feed the main company, and the dance community at large, not simply by producing ace technicians, but by developing personalities who can claim their space. The dancers seem to grow before our eyes. The repertory Waters selects is adventurous, too. Viewers can rely upon her artistic curiosity and good taste.

Opening the first of two programs, Carlos dos Santos' "Proximity" is an oddball character study, alternating between firm outlines and nervous energy that vibrates. Four individuals are assigned to equal spots on black squares. The relationships they forge or fail to realize, once they leave these stations, are unpredictable and intriguing.

In "Doscongio," by Robert Moses, a cello sonata becomes the vehicle for a hero's Romantic journey. Renaldo Gardner's unassuming shirt and slacks cannot disguise the vital force that ripples down from his shoulders, and comes to rest in figures etched with calm self-possession. His body becomes an expressive prism. With its relentless focus this showpiece demands stamina and effort. Yet "Doscongio" is most affecting in stillness, when in a momentary ascension Gardner's spirit seems to float.

Emerging choreographer Kyle Abraham's "The Corner" is light-hearted and eclectic. Its score is all over the map — from boom-box rap to Chopin and Donny Hathaway; and the vocabulary ranges from ballet to break dancing. It's curious what today's young artists plunder from the classics. The amorous intrigues and jealousies in "The Corner's" opening scene might have been lifted from "Don Quixote." Kelly Robotham coyly ends a pirouette with her arm linked in Gardner's, à la the "peasant pas" in "Giselle."

The mood turns serious in a weighted duet for Collin Heyward and Jacqueline Green that draws out all her statuesque gravity, but then Abraham interrupts them with a verbal harangue: "Praise the Lord!" and "Put your shirt back on, before you make me cry!" With so much going on, "The Corner" should be fussy and contrived, but it isn't. Abraham directs the flow of traffic with the clarity and finesse that are the signs of genuine talent. Keep your eye on this one.

Why Donald Byrd's "Shards" has not become a staple of the Ailey rep is anyone's guess. Created for the main company in 1988, the piece is glorious. A sustained "arabesque penché" — Jacqueline Green leaning forward with her leg swept upward in a delicate balance — becomes so eloquent that the other characters on stage are magnetized, or turn away in despair. Yet "Shards" is not a dry, formal exercise. Byrd's characters relate to one another with almost shocking intensity. The men can sense the women without looking, feeling the heat prickle behind them like the sun against their backs. Green and Heyward are paired again, and when they meet face-to-face the duet explodes.

### **Ailey II**

*Where: The Ailey Citigroup Theater, 405 West 55th St. at Ninth Avenue, New York*

*When: Through Sunday. 8 p.m., Wednesday to Saturday, and 7 p.m. Sunday, with matinees at 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.*

*How much: \$45. Call (866) 811-4111 or visit [alvinailey.org](http://alvinailey.org).*