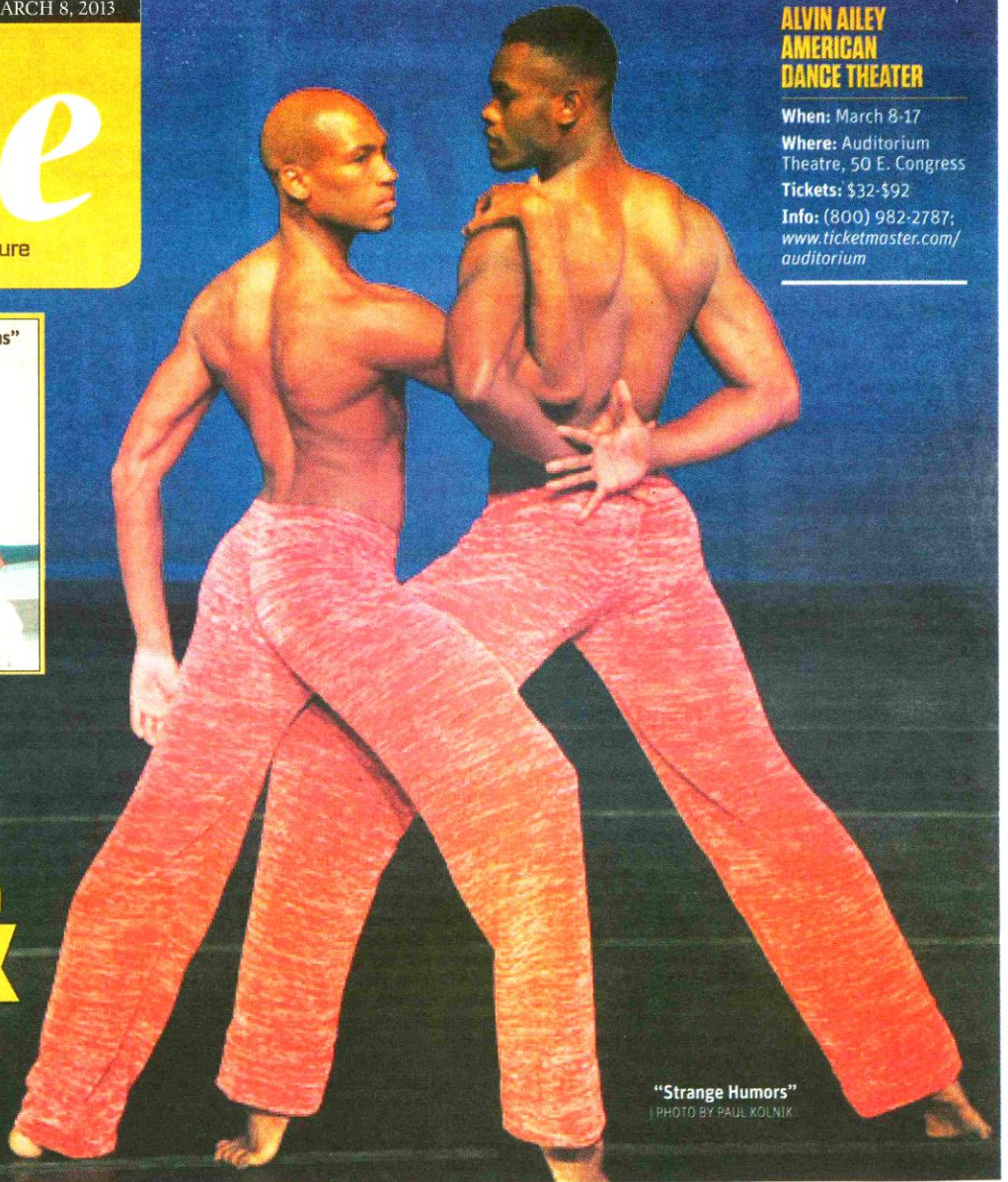


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**ALVIN AILEY
AMERICAN
DANCE THEATER**

When: March 8-17
Where: Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress
Tickets: \$32-\$92
Info: (800) 982-2787; www.ticketmaster.com/auditorium

"Strange Humors"
| PHOTO BY PAUL KOLNIK



**HEDY WEISS
ON DANCE**

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Alvin Ailey Dance's expanding repertory is full of surprises

Robert Battle is now well into his second year as artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. And as those who saw the company during its visit to the Auditorium Theatre here last year could sense, the 40-year-old choreographer wasted

no time in shaking up the company's repertory while at the same time holding fast to tradition.

The most notable addition last season was the company's performance of "Minus 16," the astonishing work by Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin.

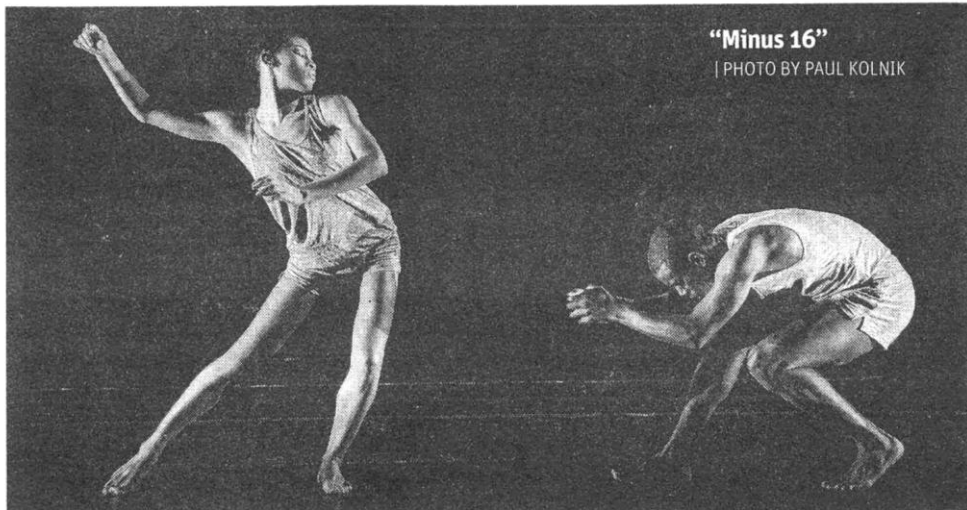
Performed by Naharin's own company, Batsheva, and for years a signature piece for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, it assumed a new level of excitement as the Ailey dancers seized hold of it. And there will be more fresh additions to the rep as the Ailey company returns

to the Auditorium for an expanded two-week run, March 8-17.

According to Battle: "When I think about bringing new or existing pieces into the rep I ask myself several questions. Do I like the choreographer's body of work? What could the

Ailey dancers add to the work, and are there some connections to be made and exploited? Will the piece let audiences see the dancers in a whole different light?"

Here is Battle's commentary on five of the nine works that will be part of its Chicago season. (Video is online at blogs.suntimes.com/arts_entertainment/.) Of



“Minus 16”

| PHOTO BY PAUL KOLNIK

course Ailey’s incomparable “Revelations” will be on every program.

◆ **“Another Night”** (a 2012 work for 10 dancers by the young Pittsburgh-bred choreographer Kyle Abraham, set to Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers’ rendition of Dizzy Gillespie’s “A Night in Tunisia”): “Kyle has a wonderful sense of craft and blends spontaneity with strong structure. There is a real rhythmic complexity to his work, and a fine sense of syncopation. And you can feel the influence of such choreographers as Mark Morris, Doug Varone, Ronald K. Brown and Alvin Ailey. In fact, when he’s in the studio creating, Kyle often calls out a choreographer’s name and says ‘Give me one of so-and-so’s moves.’ I love that.”

◆ **“Strange Humors”** (a duet for two men created by Battle in 1998, and set to a propulsive score for strings and African drum by John Mackey): “I made this piece under funny circumstances. I was on tour with the Parsons Dance company in Switzerland, and it was kind of boring, so one day I went back to my hotel room, moved the furniture and began choreographing. It’s a strangely humorous piece, with the intensity of someone who is just beginning, and it is an attempt to blend social dances like the tango with modern dance. When I look at it now I see a lot of Martha Graham’s influence.

The title was inspired by Maya Angelou’s writing about death.”

◆ **“From Before”** (a 1978 work by Garth Fagan, Tony Award-winning choreographer of “The Lion King,” danced for the first time by a company other than Fagan’s own, and set to a jazzy, percussive score by Grammy winner Ralph MacDonald): “This piece, which is a mix of African dance and Caribbean rhythms, captures the essence of Garth’s contribution to modern dance — acknowledging the West Indian influence of his background but dispensing with all the typical costuming. In its parade of solos and duets it is quite abstract and beautiful — simmering rather than exploding — and it calls to mind Merce Cunningham’s work.

◆ **“Petite Mort”** (the Ailey premiere of the renowned European choreographer Jiri Kylian’s 1991 classic, which is set to Mozart piano concertos and marked by the use of fencing foils): “I think of this ballet as a standard, like ‘Giselle’ or Gershwin’s song ‘Summertime,’ and I think it’s interesting for different companies [including Hubbard Street] to dance it, and have their often different audiences experience it. I had a chance to learn it as a student at Juilliard and felt a real connection to its lyricism, and its approach to partnering that is very

specific, beautiful and inventive. It’s a work many dancers want to do, and I thought the Ailey dancers could bring another dimension to it.”

◆ **“Minus 16”** (Ohad Naharin’s ingenious, richly improvised 1999 classic set to everything from Dean Martin to cha-cha, techno-pop and traditional Israeli music): “It’s the element of surprise in this piece that makes it so wonderful. And the section involving members of the audience who are brought onstage is so well structured — with that crazy use of ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow,’ and a hint of the ominous that then becomes endearing. And Ailey audiences, who have followed our history for 50 years, just can’t believe they are standing alongside the dancers.”

PROGRAMS:

◆ “Another Night,” “Strange Humors”; “Petite Mort”; “Revelations” (March 8 at 7:30 p.m.; March 10 at 3 p.m.; March 14 at 7:30 p.m.; March 16 at 2 p.m.)

◆ “From Before,” “Pas de Duke”; “Home”; “Revelations” (March 9 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.; March 15 at 7:30 p.m.)

◆ “Grace”; “Minus 16”; “Revelations” (March 13 at 7:30 p.m.; March 16 at 8 p.m.)

◆ “Grace”; “Pas De Duke,” “From Before”; “Revelations” (March 17 at 3 p.m.).