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SPOTLIGHT

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DANCE

Shaking things up

Ailey troupe will perform young choreographer's 1950s-centric 'Another Night'

By Robert Johnson
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

"I grew up with music. Music is my first love," says Kyle Abraham, the up-and-coming choreographer whose first commission from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will be prominently featured when the company returns to Newark this weekend.

If it weren't for his love of Prince, Abraham admits, he would not be where he is today. He agreed to let a high school friend drag him to see the Joffrey Ballet in "Billboards" only because of the ballet's pop-rock score.

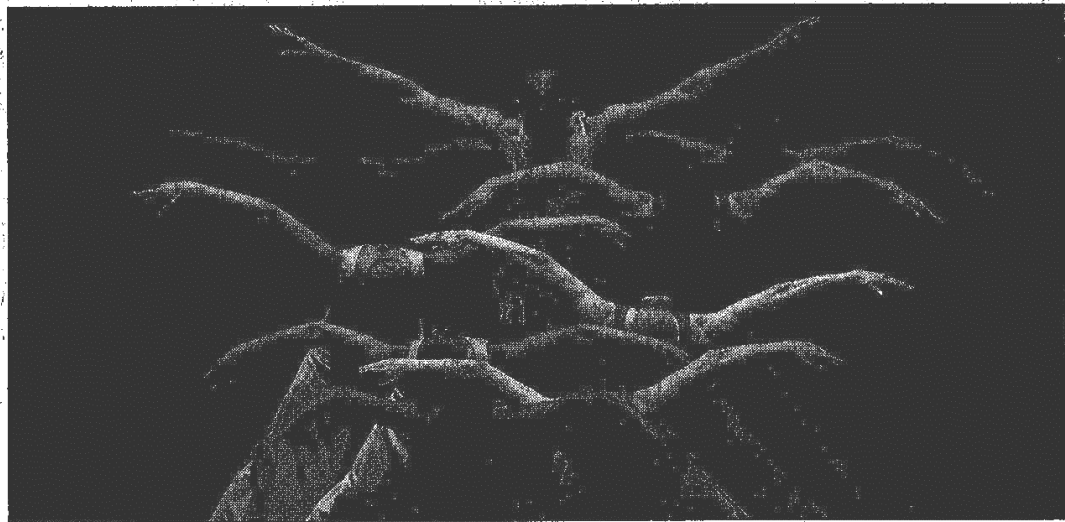
Then it hit him: he was going to be a dancer.

"I got the bug," Abraham says, sheepishly. "If it wasn't for that, I would never have seen a dance performance."

His piece for Ailey, which received its premiere last December, is called "Another Night." No, it doesn't have a score by Prince, but music was still this choreographer's all-important inspiration. Abraham says he took his cue from Art Blakey's riff on the Dizzy Gillespie classic "A Night in Tunisia," which summoned images of a bygone era.

"Close your eyes and think about the '50s," Abraham says. "There were these buildings, and communities that had this vibrancy and life to them. Now, those buildings are dilapidated. The history is still there, but what are we going to do with it?"

"Another Night" doesn't have a heavy subtext, though. According to Abraham, it's just for fun. While eager to experiment, Abraham says he knows the Ailey audience isn't the same crowd that typically comes to



PAUL KOLNIK

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will perform "Revelation" in its upcoming NJPAC appearances.

see his downtown company, Abraham in Motion. His sensibility is postmodern — he gives his troupe a Merce Cunningham class — and his dances often address identity issues.

The 35-year-old choreographer belongs to a new generation of artists who are shaking up the establishment. His inclusion signals the way the Ailey company's new artistic director, Robert Battle, is expanding its repertoire while building on the legacy of his predecessor, Judith Jamison.

Jamison will be in Newark on Friday to celebrate her 70th birthday with the troupe that she directed for 21 years; and the NJPAC engagement will include one of her most famous commissions, the inspired "Grace," by Ronald K. Brown. Audiences will also see two of Battle's surprise

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Where: Prudential Hall at New Jersey Performing Arts Center, 1 Center St., Newark

When: Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., Sunday at 3 p.m.

How much: \$25 to \$90; call (888) 466-5722 or visit njpac.org

selections: "Petite Mort," by Czech choreographer Jiri Kylián; and "Minus 16," by the Israeli artist Ohad Naharin. Set to a Mozart piano concerto, "Petite Mort" offers a ticklish view of sex in the age of Casanova. "Minus 16" is a provocative assortment of dance-theater sketches.

So as not to disappoint "Revelations" fans, each program will

conclude with the late Alvin Ailey's masterpiece. On Friday and Saturday, the troupe will perform a souped-up version featuring 50 dancers.

Abraham, who formed his own group in 2006, says he was waiting in line at the airport when he got the call from Battle offering him a commission. "I just lost it. I was crying," he says.

Although Abraham's career has been on an upswing ever since he won a Bessie Award in 2010 for his poignant dance drama, "The Radio Show," the Ailey commission has brought him more attention.

"It's crazy," he says. "I have people coming up to me that I don't even know."

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