

Ailey returns to Lincoln Center June 11-22

June 5, 2014 | By Zita Allen

This month, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) will return to Lincoln Center from June 11-22 for an exciting season that will feature the exquisite Ailey dancers in world premieres, new productions and timeless masterpieces that are sure to dazzle audiences.

Organized into four separate programs, the season features Ron K. Brown's "Grace," several works Ailey created in honor of Duke Ellington—"Night Creature," "Pas de Duke," "The River" and Bill T. Jones' "D-Man in the Waters"—and Asadata Dafora's groundbreaking 1932 solo "Awassa Astrige/Ostrich." This last work was, for years, a signature piece for dancer and choreographer Charles Moore, and now, with the help of his wife and partner, dancer, choreographer and teacher Ella Thompson Moore, it has been mounted on the Ailey company.



These works share the stage with other highlights: "The Pleasure of the Lesson," a world premiere by Robert Moses, who's known for sexy, sophisticated choreography that makes audiences want to dance too; as well as a new production of Hans van Manen's "Polish Pieces"; David Parsons' signature work, "Caught"; an encore of Wayne McGregor's "Chroma"; and Ailey's masterpiece, "Revelations."

A recent visit to the AAADT's headquarters and school in Midtown Manhattan offered a tantalizing glimpse of what's in store for the Lincoln Center audiences. One day, in a spacious, sun-drenched studio, a dozen or more dancers mastered the geometric shapes and patterns of the exuberant ensemble work of Dutch choreographer van Manen's "Polish Pieces."

On another day, Ella Thompson Moore sat next to Ailey Artistic Director Robert Battle, watching as three dancers performed the solo her husband was famous for, "Awassa Astrige/Ostrich." As they strutted, arms wide, shoulders rippling, each step undulated through their bodies as they recreated one of the earliest African dances performed on an American stage.

The visit also afforded the AmNews an opportunity to speak with Ella Thompson Moore, herself a dancer rooted in African-American dance history, as she shared her memories of and insights into the days when she and Charles Moore worked with Ailey in what would eventually become the AAADT. She also talked about how her husband came to recreate this masterful work.



"Charles always had an interest in reviving and saving important dance works," Ella Thompson Moore said. "And his love of African dance started when he was 9 years old and saw Asadata Dafore perform in Cleveland, Ohio. He had never seen African dance before. One of the dances on the program was the 'Ostrich.' Charles said it made him fall in love with African dance."

That love would lead him into a world where he would perform with a pantheon of dance greats, including Katherine Dunham and Ailey. Eventually, with his wife, Charles Moore founded the Dances and Drums of Africa, a company that was critically acclaimed for years for

its understated elegance, grace and authentic beauty of dances, which captured African, Caribbean and African-American culture.

Ella Thompson Moore says that mounting “Ostrich” with the Ailey company is a labor of love. She clearly relishes the entire process of working with the three dancers chosen to perform this historic solo. She pays meticulous attention to details during rehearsals to ensure that every step and every rippling arm movement captures the power, grace and dignity of the dance and honors its unique place in American dance history and the memory of her husband. Smiling, Ella Thompson Moore said, “I told the dancers that this dance is really about the beauty of the male body as much as it is about this big beautiful bird, the biggest bird in Africa, that, while he can’t fly, can kill a lion with his claws.”

