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Alvin Ailey Theater Starts 6-Performance Run

By Raymond Stults

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The troupe will perform “Revelations,” choreographed by Alvin Ailey.

One of the world's most celebrated modern dance troupes, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, opens a six-performance run Tuesday at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater, bringing with it two programs centered around and dedicated to "Revelations," a work choreographed by company founder Alvin Ailey half a century ago that has gone on to become, according to Dance Magazine, "the most popular modern dance piece of all time."

Moscow is the second stop on a two-month-long tour by the company that opened last week in Oslo and continues on to St. Petersburg (July 4-6), Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt and Hamburg.

The Alvin Ailey troupe's Moscow appearance takes place under the auspices of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission, created the year before last by Presidents Barack Obama

and Dmitry Medvedev to expand cooperation between the two countries over a broad range of activities, including the arts. The appearance also serves to launch a new program titled "American Seasons in Russia," which, with both private sponsorship and support from the U.S. Department of State and the Russian Culture Ministry, is scheduled to acquaint the Russian public with various forms of contemporary American art.

The appearance also marks the resumption, after a year's break, of the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko's DanceInversion contemporary dance festival, which is due in the coming season to present a stellar lineup of companies from France, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain.

Alvin Ailey, born in Texas in 1931, emerged from a childhood of dire poverty to become one of the most influential figures in the development of dance during the second half of the 20th century. Dance training in Hollywood led Ailey to appearances on the Broadway stage and, in 1958, to the formation of his own dance company. At first made up entirely of African-American dancers, it began in 1963 to reach out to those of other origins, Ailey noting at the time that he had "met some incredible dancers of other colors who could cut the work." It has remained integrated ever since.

Integrated or not, the Alvin Ailey company has from the very beginning remained focused on expressing the African-American experience in dance, transferring that experience to the stage in a manner characterized by enormous energy and a unique style that seems always to remain faithful to the sources from which it is drawn.

"Revelations," on which the current tour is focused, first appeared in 1960 and amounted to a then radical combination of modern dance and traditional African-American gospel music. In it, Ailey sought to depict his experiences growing up in the segregated South of the 1930s. Judith Jamison, director of the company since Ailey's death in 1989, sees "Revelations" as a work of "groundbreaking vision" and "a profound manifestation of how dance can celebrate the human spirit and impact our hearts and minds."

At each performance, "Revelations" will be preceded by a short documentary film describing its inspiration and significance, as well as presenting historic performance clips and rare interviews with Ailey himself.

In addition to "Revelations," Tuesday's program, due to be repeated on Thursday and at an afternoon performance on Saturday, includes "Night Creature," a work choreographed by Ailey in 1975 to music of Duke Ellington that pays homage to the composer with a fast-moving combination of modern dance and classical ballet; "In/Side," a recent solo work by long-time Alvin Ailey dancer — and soon to become company director — Robert Battle, set to music of Nina Simone and described as a "visceral cry of pure physicality"; and "Love Stories," a combined choreographic effort from 2004 by Battle, Jamison and hip-hop pioneer Rennie Harris to the music of Stevie Wonder that examines the technique, energy, movement and rhythm of African-American social dances.

The second program, which plays Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings, combines "Revelations" with another of Ailey's most famous creations, "Cry," a three-part solo work, created in 1971 as a birthday present for the choreographer's mother, that explores the trials, tribulations and eventual triumphs of "black women everywhere"; "The Hunt," a work

by Battle for six men intended to "reveal the predatory side of human nature and the primitive thrill of the hunt" and set to a thundering percussion soundtrack by New York's Les Tambours du Bronx; and "Anointed," a brand-new creation by former company member Christopher L. Huggins to the music of Moby and Sean Clements.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater plays 7 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday and again at 1 p.m. Saturday at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater, located at 17 Bolshaya Dmitrovka. Metro Chekhovskaya, Pushkinskaya. Tel. 629-2835, www.stanmus.ru.

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