

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with *Loessin at Large*. The program tells us that Alvin Ailey considered dance to be a medium for honoring the past, celebrating the present, and fearlessly reaching into the future.

To celebrate the present, the company is performing "Love Stories", a relatively new work based on hip-hop. Judith Jamison with Robert Battle and Rennie Harris choreographed this lengthy piece. It's much too long for my taste. The dancers begin in class or rehearsal. They progress to lively acrobatic hip-hop dances, and end in a progression of gospel movement. Finally they face a very bleak futuristic back drop and vanish. Does this signify the death of hip-hop? Has it gone as far as it can go? I honestly don't know. Although hip-hop is great fun, it becomes repetitive on stage after a while. All social dancing, street dancing and ballroom dance, are pleasant to do but grow boring when one just watches. The late and great Michael Bennett did a musical called *BALLROOM* in which all the dancing took place in a dance hall. The dancing was pretty much literal ballroom. The show tanked. The dances we do for pleasure must be made theatrical by the choreographer when they are put on stage.

Once "Love Stories" is over, the evening soared to realms of excellence. "Acceptance in Surrender", the opening dance of the second part, features an absolutely stunning performance by Asha Thomas. She dances with miraculous control. Performing with her are Chris Jackson, Antonio Douthit and Guillermo Asca, all three men of impressive strength. Its theme is somewhat open-ended but provokes many images of conflict, pain and final acceptance as the title suggests.

"Solo", choreographed by Hans van Manen is a delightful showcase with whimsical humor danced flawlessly by Abdur-Rahim Jackson, Jamar Roberts and Kirven J. Boyd. These handsome, supple, gracefully athletic men exemplify the company's finely honed training and physical choices in casting.

Paying homage to the past, the third and final work is the sublime masterpiece of Alvin Ailey, "Revelations". I have had the privilege of seeing it many times and find the work more and more fulfilling with each viewing. It embraces a wide gamut of emotions from pain to pleasure and offers shining opportunities to most members of the company. This rendering seemed especially precise and finely etched. To try to define all aspects of this glorious work of art makes me want to get into adjective inflation. Suffice to say, they of that fabulous parasol and fluttering fans will live for ever.

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre is a Virginia Arts Festival main event that you don't want to miss. This is Edgar Loessin with *Loessin at Large* and I'll see you at the next opening.