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Ailey & company still a revelation

By LEIGH WITCHEL

THERE'S more to Alvin Ailey's annual City Center season than "Revelations." Yet there's a reason why it's on so many of the bills: like "The Nutcracker," it's something you should see at least once — and, when it's performed as it was on Friday night, more than that.

The beloved hit was the close of a well-rounded program that featured works by company founder Ailey, current director Robert Battle and Tony Award-winning choreographer Garth Fagan.

The company premiere of the evening was his "From Before." To rhythmic drums and songs in Yoruba, the

DANCE REVIEW

**ALVIN AILEY
AMERICAN DANCE
THEATER**

*New York City Center, 131 W.
55th St.; 212-581-1212.
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dancers cross the stage and exit in dazzling little entries, pumping their arms and torsos. The music shifts to honky-tonk, and so does the dancing as the cast masses together, kicking their legs to the front.

Fagan made "From Before" in 1978, nearly two decades before "The Lion King," but even in bright unitards in-

stead of complex masks, it has a similar style and infectious energy.

Ailey's "Night Creature" celebrates Duke Ellington's music. Led by the impossibly long and elegant Alicia Graf Mack, the women sell it for all they're worth, vamping their partners — and us. The décor feels retro but futuristic — a green backdrop and silvery blue costumes — but by the swing dance finale we've landed from deep space at the Cotton Club.

Battle's contribution, "In/side" is a brief, effective show-off piece for another elegant giraffe, Jamar Roberts, wearing only black briefs while Nina Simone's emotional recording of

"Wild Is the Wind" plays. He stands still with his back to us, then suddenly corkscrews into a spin and slams to the ground, pleading.

You'd think the dancers would get tired of "Revelations," particularly Renee Robinson, who's been dancing it more than three decades. Yet the gospel classic looked as fresh as it did at its 1960 premiere. Sean A. Carmon did huge spidery jumps to "Sinner Man," but the center of attention is Robinson, who is giving her final performance with the company on Sunday night. She's obviously decided to make these last few days count.

Our big tip: Don't ever leave "Revelations" before



Paul Kolnik

Garth Fagan's "From Before" had an energetic Ailey premiere.

the encore. Robinson looks joyously possessed as she picked up her skirts and stamped out the beat. As im-

portant a work as "Revelations" is, what packs the house is the freedom and spontaneity of the dancers.