

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER  
Dances by Maurice Bejart, Twyla Tharp and Alvin Ailey  
Presented by the Virginia Arts Festival  
Chrysler Hall  
May 2, 3, and 4  
For tickets call (757) 671-8100

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large

The Alvin Ailey Dance theater, which is credited with revolutionizing dance in America, is celebrating its fiftieth birthday. A short, but highly interesting film, highlighting its history is shown prior to the program of three dances.

The beautiful people who make up this company have so many skills of athletic grace and beauty, and finely tuned dance techniques in various forms, one feels they have little need of a choreographer. Not true, of course, but their incomparable talent stands tall.

In Maurice Bejart's "The Firebird" this fact is especially evident. Bejart is known for creating great solo dances while his work with the ensemble has sometimes been called banal. Don't expect to see a present day Maria Tallchief or Gelsey Kirkland in feathery costumes. For she is now a he bird, and there are two of them. They seem to be revolutionary rebels surrounded by ashen clad bodies suggesting the phoenix legend. When one dies for the common good, he is replaced by another who rises from the ashes. The Igor Stravinsky score is still there. The two men who dance the firebirds are magnificent. The program is confusing but I think their names are Antonio Douthit and Adam Mckinney. Their strength and physical agility are thrilling to behold.

Twyla Tharp's "The Golden Session" performed to music by David Byrne is the second dance. It's an explosive romp made up of gymnastic creations, daring leaps and falls, and combinations from nearly every conceivable style of dancing. It adds up to a potpourri of movement but little action. Her intention seems to be to show off, which she often does, her vast dance vocabulary. To me, there is a repetitious sameness to her work. The upside of this piece is that it gives each company member a chance to display his or her assorted abilities. Maybe that's its purpose.

And then there's Alvin Ailey's masterpiece, the ever rejuvenating "Revelations". I feel certain it will still be very much alive in the next 50 years in this company's body of work. I've seen this traditional celebration several times and each viewing reveals something new, some subtle emotion or revelation. The moment that glorious white parasol appears your spirits begin to soar. There is never a let up in this joyous journey to redemption and it has to be magic that make you feel these unique dancers are performing the piece for the first time. It always has the same vigorous freshness and emotional potency that put you safely in the bosom of Abraham.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.