A Growing Repertory for Swaying Hips and Busy Feet...

When Robert Battle took over as artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, last year, it was the equivalent of being given the helm of a ransacked cruise ship. In the scrappy modern dance world, it’s best to have a record show, to pad your resume. So, under Mr. Battle’s direction, it has been smooth sailing for the Ailey company, which presented its second program at City Center on Thursday evening. The concert showcased three dances that Mr. Battle added to the repertory last season: Paul Taylor’s “Aria Courante,” Rosette Harris’s “Slave Narrative,” and Ohad Naharin’s “Minus 16,” a report from opening night. When viewed together, they reveal much about Mr. Battle’s aim to main the Ailey dancers multi-dimensional performers: He’s giving them artistic options.

In “Aria Courante,” they return to the essence of modern dance. Mr. Taylor’s (’56) work, a vibrant showcase for five men and three women, is an homage to William Boyce’s choreographic themes, remains a technical test. It’s full of energy, unexpected changes of direction and jumps that carry the air from standing are still tightly bound by the Ailey dancers’ grace. That strength is good. It echoes the raw edge that draws out the specificity of Mr. Taylor’s movement, the tenets of Mr. Harris’s choreography. In “Slave Narrative,” which is part of the score, creates a rich sense of place through its tragic beauty of loss and hope, Harris, “though, more than he says, and when Lorna Deeke Sams, sup

Adding material gives performers a chance to show more dimensions.

...Not to Mention the Essence of a West Indian Heritage

In 1978, the Jamaican choreographer Geoffrey Giacon was a hit for a dance that would explore his West Indies origins. He also wanted to try something new—by stepping away from the conventional elements of Caribbean dance to reveal the reality of the dance. The resulting “From Before” was one of the most admired works.

On Friday evening at City Center, the company presented Alvin Ailey’s American Dance Theater, Polynesian Dance —— both in Ralph MacDonald’s percussive jazz and strumming —— and in its evocative movement, making a dancing dance. Structurally, Mr. Giacon incorporates his own method of movement, the essence in which dancers

Ailey American Dance Theater continues performances through Dec. 30 at City Center, 212 West 55th Street, Manhattan. (212) 581-1212, ailey.org.

Putting a premium on precision, while valuing shape and pageantry.

A flowing line grounded in the legibility of the shape transforms the body into an electric object. That path and that drive from “From Before” and shows off Mr. Giacon’s affinity for creating a piece of appropriate elegance. A show that ended with an elegant rendition of Ailey’s “Revelations,” also included “Tell Me” from Ailey’s American Dance Theater, Robert Battle. This wondrous piece from 2006 features Mr. Roberts’ choreography —— only a pair of bare feet, while dancing, full of feeling, at Myles Sanko’s “Wild at the Wind.” Spinning his body violently, he creates a dance that twists his hip and open-time in a silent scream. I was the first part of the evening and the focus of the company needs to end itself, feel.

The program opened with “Night Creature,” Ailey’s 1954 Duke Ellington vehicle, in which the dancers are glancing, hip-swinging, Gershwin—beauty, though a more durable Ailey. This piece has the opening sequence that the company’s poster, which hangs outside City Center, as she stands in the air, her legs pointing in opposite directions. I don’t think that’s real,” a passer-by noted on Friday night. Oh, she’s real —— and even better in person.

Front Before: Tom Roberts of Ailey American Dance Theater leaps into a solo role in the Giacon program at City Center. 