

Cry – alvin ailey essay



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'Cry' is a dance choreographed by a very talented and well-recognised choreographer named Alvin Ailey. This was created in 1971. Ailey has created many incredible works but I must say that 'Cry' was one of his most outstanding works of art. The dance's intent is to portray the struggle & strength of the African American women who were in the slave trade; how women so enslaved & trapped can still manage to be so free.

Everything in this piece was thought of in specific detail in order to portray the intent as well as possible. For example, in this work there are three distinct sections and for each new section, there is a new song that is played. The songs used in this work are 'Something About John Coltrane' by Alice Coltrane, 'Been On A Train' by Laura Nyro and 'Right On. Be Free.' by The Voices Of East Harlem.

In a couple of these songs the word 'north' is used quite a bit. My personal interpretation is that these slaves perhaps saw freedom and/or refuge in North America, wished to be there but something stopped them. I say this because in the song 'Been On A Train' it speaks of a woman on a train with a man who is addicted to drugs. This train is heading north but as the song goes on it shows the man's addiction affecting the woman in a way that she does not wish to be on that train anymore heading north. The words are "I saw a man take a needle full of hard drug, and die slow." "He died in the morning sun, and I ain't going north no more."

The first dancer to perform this work publicly was Judith Jamison. Judith, as an extremely talented performer was able to portray Alvin Ailey's intent flawlessly. She clearly demonstrated Ailey's mother's struggles as well as

any other African American woman's struggles at the time as a slave to their fight for freedom.

The first section of 'Cry' introduces the idea of the piece immediately by Judith Jamison (while wearing a white leotard and long white skirt) representing her place in the 'food chain' using low levels & body language. One of the biggest hints that give away this intent is the use of a singular prop used throughout the entire dance. This prop is a long piece of white material (that has characteristics of a silk scarf) and is used to symbolise the boundaries and restraints in the lives of the slaves. Her emotions change throughout this section, she is hidden at first but then she progressively becomes angrier as she is frustrated & confined while doing things she does not want to do.

The movements used in this section are very long and flowing. There are several arm extensions & contractions that are soon followed by Jamison's torso pushing back up. I see the arm extension as trying to reach out for freedom and something better outside of that small box of slavery and I see the contractions as the pressure finally getting to her and then she decides to not give in to that pressure.

In the second section it represents the women fighting for their freedom. The movements are a lot more circular in this section. It uses more contractions, releasing & vibratory movements. In the first two sections, the dancer shows the struggle being not only physical but emotional also. She does this by the powerful expressions she uses on her face. She even imitates a couple of

screams that play in the song ' Been On A Train'. This gives the audience a clear understanding of the how she is feeling.

The connection between the second and third section is that it goes from fighting for freedom to finally having it. In this last section, we can see the excitement & joy from Jamison's new expression on her face & the way her body is moving. It has gone from contractions, low movements, & stillness to jumps, turns & high kicks. She does these high level movements physically to represent how happy and high she feels emotionally to finally have this freedom.

There are a couple of themes used in this extravagant work of art. The main theme is the obvious one; it's Alvin Ailey and his strong relationship with his mother Lula Elizabeth Ailey. His other theme is his empathy towards all women and the fact that he has the talent to portray the thoughts and feelings of women using a single dancer.

Alvin Ailey created the perfect mix by using his choreographing skills, and Judith Jamison's dancing skills to give a performance worth watching again & again. I highly recommend watching this work to anybody who knows something amazing when they see it.