

Onstage now: Alonzo, the King of the Dance

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The African-American artist Alonzo King belongs to the category of choreographers who, after years of creating ballets, is only now receiving due recognition for his talent. Only in the past few years has King come to be considered in the US as carrying on the legacy of Arthur Mitchell. As a young dancer, King was mentored by Mitchell, and also performed with his company, Dance Theatre of Harlem (which, sadly, no longer exists). Recently, Alonzo King has obtained several honors and awards that have temporarily taken him away from San Francisco—the home of his company, Lines Ballet, since 1989—and brought him on tours that extend throughout Europe.

The company travels with a full set of glossy, captivating photographs, and, above all, with a small but extremely fierce band of eight dancers, whose beauty and technical mastery—including pointe-work—is beyond reproach. There are long-limbed dancers who resemble bronze Hellenic statues with elongated muscles; there are Caucasian dancers whose mind-blowing, energetic leaps cannot fail to make an impression; and then there are the female dancers, who are quite capable of mesmerizing an audience.

At Adda Danza—a festival now in its 14th year, with an ever-growing audience, set in the striking theater at the hydroelectric Center of Trezzo—King presented two evenings of performance, thereby giving four different examples of his glistening, evocative formalism. *Signs and Wonders*, set to traditional African music, and *Dust and Light*, set to Corelli's *Concerti Grossi* and Poulenc's sacred choral music, were European premieres; however, the style of these works was not a notable departure from the other two ballets.

On the empty stage, the center was reserved for duets, while trios came together along the diagonals; the whole stage was filled with gliding movement. This conceptual simplicity and the minimal and transparent costumes find their counterpoint in a neo-academic language of ballet that almost spews forth its excesses: bursting with off-balance positions, extensions, legs raised so high that they brush the tips of the dancers' hair; but there are also turns (so many, too many!), that remind you of those writers who abound in adjectives, instead of choosing that single word that would be indispensable to the definition of the object. And that "ballet-object," for Alonzo King, is of great effect but of dubious expressivity, because he applies the synthesized structures of African dance—and, generally, always the same ones—to his uninhibited classicism.

This generates a continual explosion of incredibly virtuosic, rapid leaps and elevations, which change little according to the variations of the music. Only in the sorrowful and grave *Dust and Light* (the freshest of the ballets), does the choreographer attempt a sharper discursive articulation. He introduces a series of untamed crawling movements on the floor; the *pas de deux* contains a struggle, with the women's tactics represented as fierce impediments that may be swept away. There are true creative sparks, but these are not developed: the relation between bodies in space-time is still trapped in pre-defined clichés. Thus we end in a state of admiration, stunned at the dancers' virtuosity. It could be enough.