

## **Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation celebrates roof-breaking, design of new wing**

By Zita Allen  
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Since 2005, home for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Foundation has been a sleek, glass-enclosed building on the northwest corner of West 55th Street and Ninth Avenue in Manhattan known as the Joan Weill Center for Dance. A multifaceted cultural institution launched more half a century ago by the African-American choreographic genius who tapped into dance's artistic, educational and social transformational power, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has become New York's largest, most active destination for dance.

At the 2005 celebration of the building's opening, when then-Artistic Director Judith Jamison led a jubilant

procession of dancers and drummers through the city streets, who would have thought its success would be such that soon it would be bursting at the seams? Today, the Ailey building bustles with a variety of dance classes and has spacious, sun-drenched studios, a jewel-box theater and a beehive of administrative offices. Annually, it attracts an ever-growing number of students, both aspiring dancers and dance-lovers, and more than 200,000 visitors from all over the world. Obviously, expansion is necessary if supply is to keep up with demand.

Tuesday, Sept. 20, Ailey Foundation leaders joined dancers from the Ailey Company, Ailey II, students from The Ailey School, philanthropists and business and political leaders to celebrate the roof-breaking and unveil designs for a new multimillion dollar education wing. Dancers from The Ailey School performed a piece created especially for the occasion entitled "Ascension," which culminated in the design reveal and a ceremonial roof-breaking. Guests signed a steel beam set to rise with the expanding building, indicating their support for Ailey's ongoing impact on arts and culture. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Jacqueline Green and dancers from Ailey II performed excerpts from Ailey's beloved signature work, "Revelations," in the beautiful fifth floor studio with the stunning Manhattan skyline as a backdrop.

Joining Ailey Artistic Director Robert Battle and Executive Director Bennett Rink to underscore the momentous occasion were Ailey's Chair Daria L. Wallach, President Debra L. Lee, Chair Emerita Joan H. Weill and Philanthropist Elaine P. Wynn. Other attendees included Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl, Artistic Director Emerita Judith Jamison and former Executive Director Sharon Gersten Luckman.

Battle declared that the expansion was "following in the footsteps of our legendary founder Ailey's mission to continually touch the hearts and minds of people of all ages and backgrounds in life-changing ways."

The architectural and programmatic expansion were made possible by an ambitious fundraising effort called the Campaign for Ailey's Future, which was inaugurated by philanthropist Sandy Weill to celebrate his wife Joan for more than two decades of transformative leadership of the Ailey Board. According to Rink, the campaign has raised \$48 million toward its \$50 million goal.

Wallach and Lee announced that the expanded portion of the building, to be named the Elaine P. Wynn & Family Foundation Education Wing, will add three floors to the west side of the Ailey building, "providing much-needed space in response to the demand for Ailey's education initiatives."

Ailey officials thanked the de Blasio administration, in partnership with the City Council and the Manhattan Borough president's office, for a \$2 million capital investment that acknowledges the tremendous value the institution adds to the city's cultural life.

Slated to open in the fall of 2017, the new Elaine P. Wynn & Family Foundation Education Wing enhances the Ailey's ability to address a key priority area in its strategic plan by creating space for curriculum enhancements and supplemental classes in performance techniques, musical theater, partnering and strength training, and the new classrooms will accommodate study in anatomy, nutrition, music, stagecraft and production, along with wellness sessions and other professional development seminars.

Four dance studios will be added, as will two flexible classrooms and administrative offices. The existing lounge, locker rooms and restrooms and the company's costume shop will be renovated. There will be a host of infrastructure upgrades to lighting and audiovisual theatrical equipment, as well as mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. A planned new façade features motorized solar shades and more, with a design inspired by Ailey's signature masterpiece, "Revelations." New warmup spaces and lounges will include rubber flooring, recycled from tires, and additional and renovated spaces will have energy-saving, state-of-the-art lighting and dimming systems. A representative said that the primary education goal is to ensure that The Ailey School is "competitive in attracting and retaining students of the highest caliber by developing additional studio space to meet demand and enhance programs."

After all, The Ailey School expects approximately 230 more students in the Junior Division by 2019. The Ailey Extension, given its phenomenal popularity, is also expected to grow. For the Professional Division, curriculum enhancements will likely increase the number of studio and academic class offerings, from the 185 classes offered today to 270 classes in the near future. By increasing both the number and breadth of its academic classes, Ailey hopes to significantly enhance students' ability to enter the workforce in the field of dance and the arts at large as performers, educators, managers and producers.

While all of that is impressive, the expansion is just the tip of the iceberg. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of devoted supporters committed to furthering Ailey's legacy, the organization is able to deepen its commitment to communities across the country. To expand its position as a cultural ambassador, in the coming year Ailey will pilot an initiative entitled "Destination Dance," which will collaborate with community-based organizations in urban areas across the country to use dance as a centerpiece for engagement. Atlanta will be the jumping off point for the pilot project, building on the company's 41-year history in that city. To meet an increasing demand for Ailey's performances and year-round programming, it will offer everything from performances to dance classes open to the public, education programs for children and conversations with artists and scholars. The plan is to link programs thematically to tie the offerings together and help folks to see dance as a galvanizing cultural force. There's even a dedicated website resource for the initiative in the works. There's also talk of collaborations with the Atlanta Ballet and much, much more, including an expansion of the summer program known as AileyCamp for children aged 11-14 that uses dance to enhance the lives of the underserved. AileyCamp recently launched in Seattle, adding it to an existing roster that includes Atlanta, Baltimore, Berkeley, Chicago, Kansas City (Mo.), Kansas City (Kan.), Miami, New York and Newark. Another program expansion in the works is AileyDance Kids, which presents dance classes and cross-curricular lessons to more than 5,000 public school students annually in New York and New Jersey.

And, let us not forget that at the heart of this impressive list of projects is the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which returns to New York City Center from Nov. 30 to Dec. 31, 2016, and a headquarters unlike that of any other American modern dance company.