

## How Alvin Ailey Dance Theater is Making Modern Dance “Pop” Again

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Modern dance is waning in popularity, and young people don't seem to feel as connected with the work anymore. So what's a 60-year-old ballet company like Alvin Ailey to do to seem limber again? The Nae Nae, for one. The truly modern dance is part of a two-act ballet called "Lazarus," which the company hopes will break through to a new generation of fans.

Choreographed by Rennie Harris, "Lazarus," is peppered with references to some of the most popular dances of the last decade, including the Nae Nae, Dougie, Milly Rock and, of course, the Dab.

"You want to introduce the new generation to, not only this new work, but you want the history of this company, right," said Harris. "And to help carry on the legacy. That's the whole point about 'Lazarus.' is like this resurrection, this keeps happening, you know what I mean?"

In 1958, when Ailey founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, it was an instant sensation internationally. Its initial success was thanks in large part to Ailey's masterpiece, "Revelations," which showcased the agony and triumph of the African-American experience to a global audience — even as the black troupe was treated as second-class citizens in many places it toured at home.

"You have to think even when this company started touring in the States there were some hotels that perhaps they were the first black folks to come into those doors, the front door certainly," said Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater artistic director Robert Battle.

Battle said that Ailey started the dance company because he saw no opportunities for African-Americans in the concert dance, and wanted their stories told on stage. Ailey knew what it meant to be left out and the importance of accessibility.

Khalia Campbell is one of the dancers featured in "Lazarus." She said that Ailey gave her hope as a dancer when she first started out, because she saw bodies on the stage that looked like hers. She believed that the choreography in Harris' work will have the same effect on newer faces in attendance.

"People that are non-dancers will be able to relate to this because they don't know about a lateral T or like a tendu, so when they see the Nae Nae — I feel accomplished a little bit because what I'm doing onstage will kind of get across to the audience."

Watch here: [https://news.vice.com/en\\_us/article/bje5jd/how-alvin-ailey-dance-theater-is-making-modern-dance-pop-again](https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/bje5jd/how-alvin-ailey-dance-theater-is-making-modern-dance-pop-again) (4 minutes)

*The segment originally aired December 6, 2018 on VICE News Tonight*