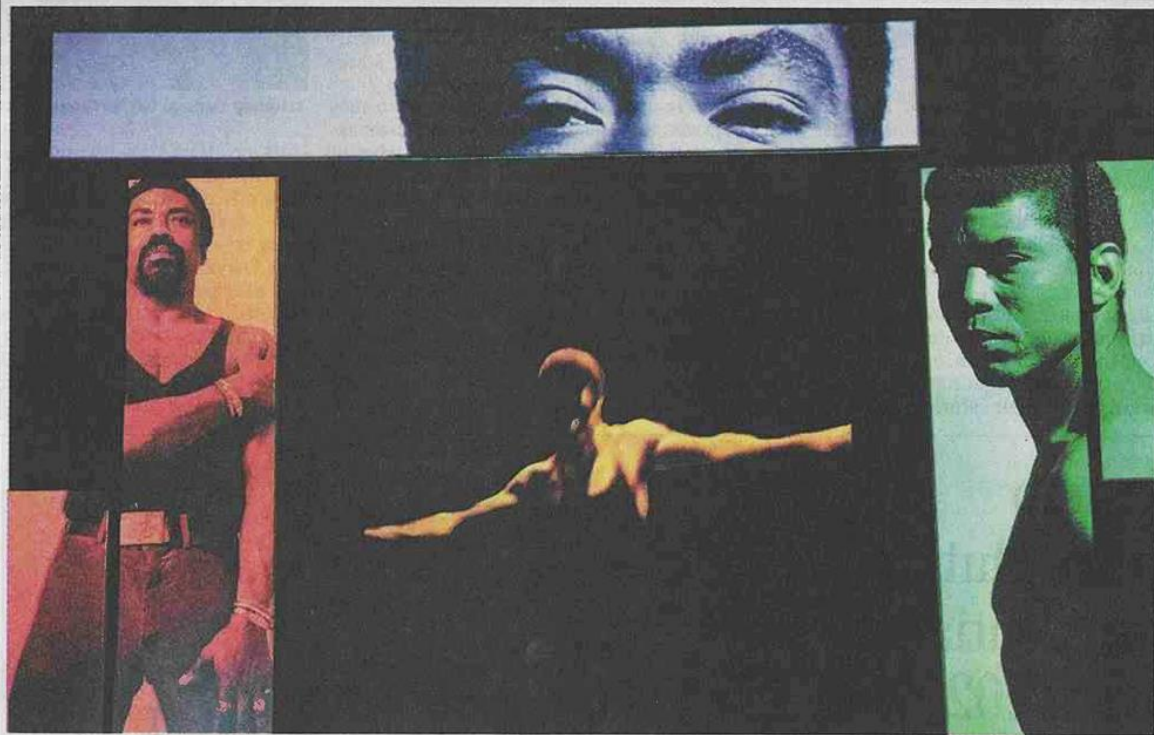


# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## Ailey Ensemble Honors Its Founder

By: Charles Passy

November 28, 2018



The multimedia piece 'Becoming Ailey' shows historic footage of Alvin Ailey dancing and includes sound bites of the choreographer.

## Ailey Ensemble Honors Its Founder

By CHARLES PASSY

When the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater company takes to the stage of New York City Center for the opening of its 60th anniversary on Wednesday night, it will have an unexpected guest of sorts. Namely, Alvin Ailey himself.

The company founder, who died in 1989 at the age of 58, won't be there physically, of course. Instead, the ensemble will honor him with a brief multimedia piece, "Becoming Ailey," which was created for the occasion. It shows historic footage of Ailey dancing and includes sound bites of the choreographer talking about himself and his artistic vision.

"I create movement," Ailey says in the multimedia piece.

But in some ways, this tribute is a departure for the Ailey company, which has often chosen not to shine a spotlight on its founder, in keeping with Ailey's own ideal.

Even as he built the foremost American company rooted in the black experience and created its signature body of works, from "Revelations" to "Cry," the choreographer aimed to draw more attention to his dancers than to himself, with one of his company members, Judith Jamison, succeeding him as artistic director. And unlike many founders of modern-dance companies, Ailey welcomed other choreog-

rappers into the fold.

Now, the company, which always has performed Ailey's works throughout its six-decade history, is thinking about how to make more of its namesake.

As part of its 60th anniversary season at City Center, the company, now under the artistic leadership of Robert Battle,

*The dance company will shine a light on Alvin Ailey, as it celebrates 60 years.*

is offering two world premieres of works intended as tributes to Ailey: Rennie Harris's "Lazarus," the first two-act ballet in the company's history, and Ronald K. Brown's "The Call." Moreover, the company is offering select performances of "Revelations," his most famous piece, with live accompaniment by a gospel choir and orchestra.

Beyond the stage, the Ailey organization is involved with a

project by Hollywood studio Fox Searchlight to bring Ailey's life story to the screen.

Ailey was born in Texas and grew up in California. He found his way to dance in his teens and went professional in his 20s, performing on Broadway in shows that starred such greats as Lena Horne and Pearl Bailey. In 1958, he formed his own company, which became a global phenomenon during his lifetime.

Today, the Ailey organization, which has a \$40 million annual budget, encompasses not only the main Ailey company, but also a secondary one for younger dancers. It runs a school in New York City and educational programs nationwide.

Ailey officials say the effort to draw attention to the founding choreographer comes largely from a realization that there is a generation of dance patrons who recognize the man's name, but little else.

"Half of the audience may not know what he looked like, what he sounded like," said Masazumi Chaya, the company's associate artistic director, who joined the troupe in 1972 as a dancer.

SARAH BLESENER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL