

## Alvin Ailey's Opening Night Gala Was a Revelation of Spirit and Soul

By: Lauren Cooper

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"The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater makes us feel...the struggle to be free, the tenacity of the human spirit, the triumph of faith—these are the eternal truths of Alvin Ailey's enduring Revelations," said Broadway star Renée Elise Goldsberry, the gala's honorary chair, as she introduced the dance company's signature performance.



The gala consisted of a two-part evening, celebrating the opening night of the five-week holiday season. It began with a multi-act performance featuring a tributary excerpt by Merce Cunningham, which was followed by the premiere of a new piece by Darrell Grand Moultrie called Ounce of Faith, which felt fresh, optimistic and modern, and, of course, concluded with the dance company's famous Revelations. Following the show, guests made their way to a benefit dinner, where they were greeted by a 20-plus person band singing renditions of songs by Lizzo, Beyoncé, Whitney Houston, and Rihanna—modern anthems of empowerment.



The benefit raised more than \$2 million to fund the creation of new works like Moultrie's and to support The Ailey School and its scholarship programs, which provide a space for expression, education, and community regardless of age, race, or economic standing.



Over a dinner of hearty roast chicken and thyme-infused aperitifs, loyal Ailey fan and half of the Lion Babe duo Jillian Hervey reminisced about attending the company's performances growing up, dreaming of one day dancing on its stage. She noted that the technical skills are, of course, magnificent, but what really sets the Alvin Ailey group apart is its ability to express a story and transcend time and place, a tenet that is the backbone of what it does.



Likewise, Ryan Jamaal Swain, who "represented" in a Pyer Moss ensemble with a Derrick Adams print, recalled the connection he forged with the Ailey company while filming scenes for Pose in the school's studios. "What's so beautiful about Alvin Ailey is that it represents black excellence, black opulence, and just the epitome of America, because quite honestly, we're a hodgepodge of things.... [As we look to the future,] my only hope is that we listen more, that we develop compassion. I think that art and dance are among the beautiful things that we can find ourselves in, regardless of race, creed, or orientation," Swain shared.



They say art often serves as a mirror on society, while also reflecting the potential for what the world can be. Per the latter, last night dreamed of optimism and exuberance. Especially when the band started singing Lizzo's Juice, which had the dance floor vibrating. The evening's mission was to honor the great form of contemporary dance, so it was only fitting that the night ended with a dance party.

