



Alvin Ailey Choreographer Brings 'Members Don't Get Weary' To Atlanta

By: Myke Johns

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The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre has been creating transcendent moments for 60 years, and one of its newest voices is that of dancer and choreographer Jamar Roberts.

The Ailey company is in town now and their program includes Roberts' work, titled "Members Don't Get Weary."

"Members..." draws inspiration from the Ralph Ellison quote, "The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience

alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it."

Roberts said he came across it long before he created the dance.

"I knew that [the dance] was going to be about the blues," he tells "City Lights" host Lois Reitzes, "I started going down the rabbit hole of different artists I was inspired by, to see what they had to say, translating that lived experience into literature. I think [the quote] is dead on."

The title of the piece comes from a Max Roach album.

"I was speaking to members of all kinds," Roberts said. "I was speaking to my company members—the work that we do is very difficult and very trying—and also members of society."

The work was conceptualized while on tour in the UK and just before the 2016 presidential election, and Roberts says that the "onslaught of troubling information" he was absorbing came out in the dance, which premiered in December 2017.

In the time since its premier, Roberts says that as anxiety over the state of the country persists, the message of the piece has not changed. "If anything it's asking us to persist," he says.

Choreographed to music from John Coltrane's album "Olé Coltrane," Roberts' work combines ballet, jazz, and modern dance.

"It has a pulse," he says of the music, "it has a drive that really pushes the piece along. It has this urgency that matches what I was feeling at the time."

Synthesizing the idea of The Blues and the pains of life in America into an art form with no words is not a small feat, and it's one that the dancer takes a very physical approach to.

"For me I feel like dance is very expansive," Roberts says. "I feel like I can go beyond my physical body to express whatever I need to express. I think every human emotion can be expressed through the body."

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater returns to the Fox Theater as part of their 60th anniversary North American tour from Feb. 21-24.

Listen here: <https://www.wabe.org/alvin-ailey-choreographer-brings-members-dont-get-weary-to-atlanta/> (15 minutes)