

## 'Testament': Alvin Ailey Dance Theater perseveres through COVID pandemic

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Watch here <https://abc7ny.com/alvin-ailey-dance-theater-forward-testament-sandy-kenyon/8820924/> (3 minutes)

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has been devastating for the performing arts in New York City, with concert venues and Broadway theaters shut down. But those who run the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater were determined not to cancel the Company's traditional holiday shows. The result is Ailey Forward, a series of nine performances online that are available for free. Ailey Forward is a fitting title for these presentations, which extend from now through to the end of the year. The work was filmed at a variety of locations in the city, including Wave Hill Public Garden and Cultural Center overlooking the Hudson River in the Bronx. That's where a new work called "Testament" was filmed, and it is a tribute to Ailey's resilience.

"We had to figure out, how do we speak? How do we reach audiences?" Associate Artistic Director Matthew Rushing said. "How do we touch them in the same way we touched them when we were still in the theater?"

Rushing, who choreographed "Testament" alongside Company member Clifton Brown and former Company member Yusha-Marie Sorzan, is in his first season as part of the management team. Dancer Corrin Rachele Mitchell had just finished her first season when the Company had to go virtual.

"To be completely honest, it was emotionally devastating," she said. However, the dancers were allowed to continue, provided they didn't touch. "The CDC regulations were amazing because they allowed us to do this," Mitchell said. "But it was very strange, almost comedic for us, because we're like, 'Oh don't, don't touch me.'"

"Testament" is inspired by Ailey's classic ballet "Revelations," which premiered 60 years ago. "It's basically the idea from lament to hope," Rushing said. "Being able to turn pain into power. That's basically our main message."

The new work was created during a summer of strife following the death of George Floyd.

"We felt we couldn't ignore it," Rushing said. "So we put a lot of that pain, a lot of that resiliency, that we as people have, we put it into the work as well."

Like all great art, "Testament" reflects the era when it comes out, and it gains resonance as a result.

"To create a work that could represent how we all felt in this time has definitely made all of us grow tremendously," Mitchell said. "As well as the Company's legacy."

Stunning is the word that comes to mind when viewing Ailey Forward, as is spectacular. The New York Times describes it as a "virtual gift of joy," and that's no exaggeration. I am truly amazed that this sublime marriage of music and motion is free.