On March 30, 1958, Alvin Ailey led a group of young African-American modern dancers in a now-fabled performance at the 92nd Street Y in New York City that forever changed the perception of American dance. Mr. Ailey was a pioneer in establishing a multi-racial repertory company that presented important works by both dance masters and emerging choreographers. Regarded as one of the world’s premiere dance companies, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is a recipient of the National Medal of Arts and is recognized by a U.S. Congressional resolution as a vital American “Cultural Ambassador to the World.” Having performed in 71 countries on 6 continents for an estimated 25 million people worldwide—as well as millions more through television broadcasts, film screenings, and online platforms—Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues to inspire and unite people of all backgrounds around the globe.

Before his untimely death in 1989, Mr. Ailey named Judith Jamison as his successor, and over the next 21 years, she brought the Company to unprecedented success. Ms. Jamison, in turn, personally selected Robert Battle to succeed her in 2011. In announcing his appointment, she stated, “Combining an intimate knowledge of the Ailey company with an independent perspective, Robert Battle is without question the creative force of the future.” Through the remarkable artistry of extraordinary dancers, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues to celebrate the African-American cultural experience and to preserve and enrich the American modern dance tradition. With a repertory of over 235 works by more than 90 choreographers and a permanent home at The Joan Weill Center for Dance in New York City—the largest building dedicated to dance in New York City, the dance capital of the world—the Ailey legacy flourishes, using the universal language of dance as a medium for honoring the past, celebrating the present and fearlessly reaching into the future.

For further information, visit pressroom.alvinailey.org

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER IS APPLAUDED BY AUDIENCES AND CRITICS ALIKE

“Nothing prepares you for the totality of Alvin Ailey: the aural, visual, physical, spiritual beauty...Heaven...Everywhere you looked: sensory pleasure...”
— THE NEW YORK TIMES, ZADIE SMITH

“[Robert] Battle who carries the mantle of his stewardship with great care, not only to preserve Ailey’s spirit, but also to move the company forward and expand its repertory with new works, commissions from prominent, often groundbreaking choreographers...”
— THE BOSTON GLOBE

“In its sixty-year history, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre has enjoyed an inspiring ascent from hardscrabble origins to a long, still unchallenged reign as America’s most popular dance company...”
— THE NEW YORKER

“...how fabulously individual the dancers all are. Each is an immediately distinct character...”
— THE NEW YORK TIMES
In accordance with groundbreaking choreographer Alvin Ailey’s dictum that “dance is for everybody,” the Ailey organization offers dance performances, training and education and community programs that use the American modern dance tradition and the beauty of the African-American heritage and other cultures to enlighten, unite and inspire all people.

THE AILEY SCHOOL
Each year, more than 3,500 students of all ages from NYC, across the country and around the globe benefit from world-class training in a full range of techniques at The Ailey School, directed by Tracy Inman and Melanie Person.

THE AILEY/FORDHAM BFA IN DANCE PROGRAM
The BFA in Dance offers the best of two worlds: the artistic pre-eminence of The Ailey School combined with Fordham University’s exceptional liberal arts education that stresses intellectual development and personal growth.

ARTS IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS
The Ailey Organization is committed to bringing dance into classrooms, communities and lives of people throughout the world. Each year, more than 100,000 people from diverse backgrounds enjoy the opportunity to explore their creative potential and build their self-esteem while fostering an appreciation for the art of dance.

AILEY CAMP
The unique summer day camp serves under served youth ages 11 to 14. The program provides a safe environment where they can explore their creativity and strengthen their respect for themselves and others within a supportive framework that gives them an important foundation for the future. AileyCamps are currently operating in ten cities around the country, including NYC.

AILEY II
Ailey II is universally renowned for merging the spirit and energy of the country’s best young dance talent with the passion and creative vision of today’s most outstanding emerging choreographers. Under the vision of Artistic Director Francesca Harper, Ailey II will continue to expand the bridge from the classroom to the stage that Alvin Ailey created to constantly propel each new generation of artists forward.

AILEY EXTENSION
Ailey Extension offers students around the world “real classes for real people” at all levels in a welcoming, non-competitive environment. Nearly 40 dynamic classes are offered each week with in-studio, virtual, and hybrid class options, taught by expert teachers in West African, Zumba®, Hip-Hop, Ballet, Horton (the modern dance technique featured in Mr. Ailey’s classic, Revelations) and more.

AILEY’S HOME
In 2005, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater opened its permanent home, The Joan Weill Center for Dance, on 55th Street and 9th Avenue in Manhattan. The striking glass-enclosed building is the largest building dedicated to dance in New York City, the dance capital of the world. In 2017, The Elaine Wynn and Family Education Wing, added three floors to west side of Ailey’s building, including four dance studios to reach a total of 16, two flexible classrooms, and much more.
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater grew from a now-fabled performance in March 1958 at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. Led by Alvin Ailey and a group of young African-American modern dancers, that performance changed forever the perception of American dance. The Ailey company has gone on to perform for an estimated 25 million people at theaters in 48 states and 71 countries on six continents – and has reached millions more online and through television broadcasts.

In 2008, a U.S. Congressional resolution designated the Company as “a vital American cultural ambassador to the world” that celebrates the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience and the preservation and enrichment of the American modern dance heritage.

When Mr. Ailey began creating dances, he drew upon his “blood memories” of Texas, the blues, spirituals, and gospel as inspiration, which resulted in the creation of his most popular and critically acclaimed work, Revelations, now celebrating 60 years.

Although he created 79 ballets over his lifetime, Mr. Ailey maintained that his company was not exclusively a repository for his own work. Today, the Company continues Mr. Ailey’s mission by presenting important works of the past and commissioning new ones. In all, more than 235 works by over 90 choreographers have been part of the Alley company’s repertory.

Before his untimely death in 1989, Alvin Ailey named Judith Jamison as his successor, and over the next 21 years, she brought the Company to unprecedented success. Ms. Jamison, in turn, personally selected Robert Battle to succeed her in 2011. In announcing his appointment as Artistic Director, she stated, “Combining an intimate knowledge of the Alley company with an independent perspective, Robert Battle is without question the creative force of the future.”

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater gratefully acknowledges The Joan & Sandy Weill Global Ambassador Fund, which provides vital support for Alley’s national and international tours.
Alvin Ailey was born on January 5, 1931, in Rogers, Texas. His experiences of life in the rural South would later inspire some of his most memorable works. Mr. Ailey was introduced to dance in Los Angeles by performances of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Katherine Dunham Dance Company, and his formal dance training began with an introduction to Lester Horton’s classes by his friend Carmen de Lavallade. Horton, the founder of one of the first racially-integrated dance companies in the United States, became a mentor for Mr. Ailey as he embarked on his professional career. After Horton’s death in 1953, Mr. Ailey became director of the Lester Horton Dance Theater and began to choreograph his own works. In the 1950s and 60s, Mr. Ailey performed in four Broadway shows, including *House of Flowers* and *Jamaica*.

In 1958, he led a group of young black modern dancers in a performance in New York City that changed forever the perception of American dance. Since then, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater – a company dedicated to enriching the American modern dance heritage and preserving the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience – has gone on to perform for an estimated 25 million people in 71 countries on six continents. He created 79 ballets in his lifetime – including his first masterpiece, 1958's *Blues Suite*; his must-see signature work *Revelations*, which has been seen by more people around the world than any other work of modern, dance since its 1960 premiere; the acclaimed tour-de-force female solo created for his mother in 1971, *Cry*; and several works set to music by jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, Charlie “Bird” Parker, and Hugh Masekela – but maintained that his company was not exclusively a repository for his own work. His ballets have appeared in the repertories of major dance companies around the world, including American Ballet Theatre; The Joffrey Ballet; Dance Theatre of Harlem; Paris Opera Ballet; and La Scala Ballet, and he choreographed operas for the openings of such esteemed institutions as The Metropolitan Opera House (Samuel Barber’s *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1966) and The Kennedy Center (Leonard Bernstein’s *Mass* in 1971).

He established the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center (now The Ailey School) in 1969 and formed the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble (now Ailey II) in 1974. Mr. Ailey was a pioneer of programs promoting arts in education, and the final program he launched before his passing in 1989 was AlileyCamp – a full-scholarship summer day camp for young people ages 11 – 14 in underserved communities, now in 10 cities nationwide.

Throughout his lifetime, Alvin Ailey received numerous honors and awards, including several honorary doctoral degrees, a 1976 NAACP Spingarn Award, and a 1982 United Nations Peace Medal. From the dance world, he received the 1975 Dance Magazine Award, the 1979 Capezio Award and modern dance’s most prestigious prize—the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award—in 1987. In 1988, he received the Kennedy Center Honor in recognition of his extraordinary contribution to American culture and achievement in the performing arts. He was posthumously awarded the 2014 Presidential Medal of Freedom – the country’s highest civilian honor – in recognition of his contributions and commitment to civil rights and dance in America, as well as the 2017 Logo Trailblazer Honor, celebrating him as a leader at the forefront of LGBTQ equality. He was also the subject of *Alvin Ailey: A Life in Dance*, Jennifer Dunning’s moving 1998 biography.

When Mr. Ailey died on December 1, 1989, The New York Times said of him, “you didn’t need to have known [him] personally to have been touched by his humanity, enthusiasm, and exuberance and his courageous stand for multi-racial brotherhood.”
“Making dances is an act of progress; it is an act of growth, an act of music, an act of teaching, an act of celebration, an act of joy.”

“I am trying to show the world we are all human beings, that color is not important, that what is important is the quality of our work, of a culture in which the young are not afraid to take chances and can hold onto their values and self-esteem, especially in the arts and in dance. That’s what it’s all about to me.”

“Dance is for everybody. I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people.”

“I want to help show my people how beautiful they are. I want to hold up the mirror to my audience that says this is the way people can be, this is how open people can be.”
THE COMPANY LEADERSHIP

ROBERT BATTLE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Robert Battle became Artistic Director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in July 2011 after being personally selected by Judith Jamison, making him only the third person to head the Company since it was founded in 1958. Mr. Battle has a long-standing association with the Alley organization. A frequent choreographer and artist in residence at Alley since 1999, he has set many of his works on Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Aliley II, and at The Ailey School. The Company’s current repertory includes his ballets Ella, For Four, In/Side, Love Stories finale, Mass, and Unfold. In addition to expanding the Ailey repertory with works by artists as diverse as Kyle Abraham, Mauro Bigonzetti, Ronald K. Brown, Rennie Harris, and Paul Taylor, Mr. Battle has also instituted the New Directions Choreography Lab to help develop the next generation of choreographers.

Mr. Battle’s journey to the top of the modern dance world began in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami, Florida. He showed artistic talent early and studied dance at a high school arts magnet program before moving on to Miami’s New World School of the Arts, under the direction of Daniel Lewis and Gerri Houlihan, and finally to the dance program at The Juilliard School, under the direction of Benjamin Harkarvy, where he met his mentor, Carolyn Adams. He danced with The Parsons Dance Company from 1994 to 2001, and also set his choreography on that company starting in 1998. Mr. Battle then founded his own Battleworks Dance Company, which made its debut in 2002 in Düsseldorf, Germany, as the U.S. representative to the World Dance Alliance’s Global Assembly. Battleworks subsequently performed extensively at venues including The Joyce Theater, Dance Theater Workshop, American Dance Festival, and Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival.

Mr. Battle was honored as one of the “Masters of African-American Choreography” by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2005, and he received the prestigious Statue Award from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA in 2007. He is a recipient of the 2021 Dance Magazine Award and has honorary doctorates from The University of the Arts, Marymount Manhattan College and Fordham University. Mr. Battle was named a 2015 Visiting Fellow for The Art of Change, an initiative by the Ford Foundation. He is a sought-after keynote speaker and has addressed a number of high-profile organizations, including the United Nations Leaders Programme and the UNICEF Senior Leadership Development Programme.

MATTHEW RUSHING ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Matthew Rushing was born in Los Angeles, CA. He began his dance training with Kashmir Blake in Inglewood, California and later continued his training at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. He is the recipient of a Spotlight Award and Dance Magazine Award and was named a Presidential Scholar in the Arts. He was a scholarship student at The Ailey School and later became a member of Ailey II, where he danced for a year. During his career, Mr. Rushing has performed as a guest artist for galas in Vail, Colorado, as well as in Austria, Canada, France, Italy, and Russia. He has performed for Presidents George H. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, as well as at the 2010 White House tribute to Judith Jamison. During his time with the Company, he has choreographed three ballets: Acceptance In Surrender (2005), a collaboration with Hope Boykin and Abdur-Rahim Jackson, Uptown (2009), a tribute to the Harlem Renaissance, and ODETTA (2014), a celebration of “The queen of American folk.” In 2012 he created Moan, which was set on Philadanco and premiered at The Joyce Theater. Mr. Rushing joined the Company in 1992, became Rehearsal Director in 2010 and became Associate Artistic Director in 2020.
THE COMPANY LEADERSHIP

JUDITH JAMISON ARTISTIC DIRECTOR EMERITA

Judith Jamison joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1965 and quickly became an international star. Over the next 15 years, Mr. Ailey created some of his most enduring roles for her, most notably the tour-de-force solo Cry. During the 1970s and 80s, she appeared as a guest artist with ballet companies all over the world, starred in the hit Broadway musical Sophisticated Ladies, and formed her own company, The Jamison Project. She returned to Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1989 when Mr. Ailey asked her to succeed him as Artistic Director. In the 21 years that followed, she brought the Company to unprecedented heights – including two historic engagements in South Africa and a 50-city global tour to celebrate the Company’s 50th anniversary. Ms. Jamison is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, among them a prime time Emmy Award, an American Choreography Award, the Kennedy Center Honor, a National Medal of Arts, a “Bessie” Award, the Phoenix Award, and the Handel Medallion. She was also listed in “TIME 100: The World’s Most Influential People” and honored by First Lady Michelle Obama at the first White House Dance Series event. In 2015, she became the 50th inductee into the Hall of Fame at the National Museum of Dance. As a highly regarded choreographer, Ms. Jamison has created many celebrated works, including Divining (1984), Forgotten Time (1989), Hymn (1993), HERE . . . NOW. (commissioned for the 2002 Cultural Olympiad), Love Stories (with additional choreography by Robert Battle and Rennie Harris, 2004), and Among Us (Private Spaces: Public Places) (2009). Ms. Jamison’s autobiography, Dancing Spirit, was edited by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and published in 1993. In 2004, under Ms. Jamison’s artistic directorship, her idea of a permanent home for the Aliley company was realized and named after beloved chairman emerita Joan Weill. In 2019, Ms. Jamison and members of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater participated in a TED Talk, sharing Revelations from a Lifetime in Dance. Ms. Jamison continues to dedicate herself to asserting the prominence of the arts in our culture, and she remains committed to promoting the significance of the Aliley legacy – using dance as a medium for honoring the past, celebrating the present and fearlessly reaching into the future.

BENNETT RINK EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Bennett Rink became Executive Director of Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation in 2013. Mr. Rink first joined Aliley as Manager of Special Events in 1994, became Development Director in 1998, and then worked as Senior Director of Development and External Affairs from 2007 to 2012. In his tenure overseeing Aliley’s development, Mr. Rink led a $75 million capital campaign supporting Aliley’s first permanent home, The Joan Weill Center for Dance which opened in 2005, and established an endowment to support major program areas. When the Company celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008, Mr. Rink supervised an 18-month celebration, including events, promotions, collaborations, and special performances, bringing public awareness of the Aliley organization to new heights. Mr. Rink also oversaw “The Next Step Campaign,” which grew the organization’s endowment to $50 million. As Executive Director, Mr. Rink launched a five-year strategic plan in 2014 to realize Robert Battle’s creative vision, expand Aliley’s educational offerings, and enhance technology to extend the reach of the organization. Central to the plan has been the expansion of The Joan Weill Center for Dance, which attracts more than 200,000 visitors each year. This fall, Aliley unveiled the Center’s Elaine Wynn and Family Education Wing, providing much-needed additional studios and classroom space to meet the growing demand for Aliley’s programs. The building now comprises 87,000 square feet and is the largest destination for dance in New York City. Mr. Rink also conceived The Campaign for Aliley’s Future, a $50 million initiative to support the Center’s expansion and the ongoing implementation of other long-range strategic priorities. During Mr. Rink’s tenure, the Company deepened its presence in New York City by establishing a spring season at Lincoln Center to complement its New York City Center winter season, while also extending its role as America’s “Cultural Ambassador to the World” with tours to Africa, Europe, and South America. In order to reach audiences beyond live performances, the Company has broadened its commitment to creating film and digital content, including its first-ever theatrical movie release as part of Lincoln Center at the Movies: Great American Dance. Mr. Rink is a graduate of Syracuse University and holds a BFA in theater.

RONNI FAVORS REHEARSAL DIRECTOR

Ronni Favors is from Iowa City, Iowa. After studying at the National Music Camp in Interlochen, Michigan, with the Camp Scholarship, she continued her training at The Aliley School as a Fellowship student. Ms. Favors was a member of Aliley II, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, and a recipient of the Min-On Art Award. Ms. Favors was the ballet instructor at the 1989 inaugural session of AlileyCamp in Kansas City and served as artistic director of the Camp. She is the founding director of Children’s Aid AlileyCamp New York and provided guidance in the national implementation of the AlileyCamp programme. In 1997, Ms. Favors was named assistant rehearsal director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and was its rehearsal director from 1999 to 2010. She worked with local dance students who performed in Alvin Ailey’s Memoria in Johannesburg, South Africa, as well as in Seattle, Copenhagen, Los Angeles, Chicago, Kansas City and New York. Most recently, she set Alvin Ailey’s Night Creature on TU Dance and Oregon Ballet Theatre. Ms. Favors rejoined the company as rehearsal director in 2019.
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

LLOYD A. BOYD III
(Cleveland, OH) began dancing at the age of 13 at the Cleveland School of the Arts. Mr. Boyd is also an alumnus of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. He has worked with choreographers Bill T. Jones, Susan Jaffe, Juel D. Lane, and Larry Keigwin and was a dancer in Rasta Thomas’ Bad Boys of Dance & Ailey II. Mr. Boyd danced in the 2018 Video Music Awards show with rap artist ASAP ROCKY & Travis Scott, The Metropolitan Opera’s production of La Traviata, and the international tour of the Broadway musical An American in Paris, choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon. This is his first season with the Company. Instagram: @lloydaboyd

JEROBOAM BOZEMAN
(Brooklyn, NY) began his training under Ruth Sistaire at the Ronald Edmonds Learning Center. He later joined Creative Outlet and was granted full scholarships at the Joffrey Ballet School and Dance Theatre of Harlem. Mr. Bozeman is a gold-medalist of the NAACP ACT-SO Competition in Dance. He performed in the Broadway musical Aida (international tour in China), and with PHILADANCO!, Donald Byrd’s Spectrum Dance Theater, and Ailey II. Mr. Bozeman was a guest artist with The Royal Ballet and was nominated as one of “25 to Watch,” by Dance Magazine in 2018. He was featured in Bud Light’s NFL 100th commercial and Pyer Moss’s 2021 “Wat U Iz,” fashion show. Mr. Bozeman is an adjunct professor at NYU Tisch School for Dance. He has appeared in Vanity Fair, Neiman Marcus, Double Magazine, Seattle Met, and The New York Times. Mr. Bozeman joined the Company in 2013.

CLIFTON BROWN
(Goodyear, AZ) began his dance training at Take 5 Dance Academy and continued in the first class of the Alley/Fordham BFA Program in Dance. Mr. Brown began his professional career when he joined the Ailey company in 1999 and served as choreographic assistant to Judith Jamison. He has also danced with Earl Mosley’s Diversity of Dance and Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, and was a founding member and rehearsal director for Jessica Lang Dance. He was nominated in the U.K. for a Critics Circle National Dance Award for Best Male Dancer and received a Black Theater Arts Award as well as a New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie). As a guest artist Mr. Brown has performed with Miami City Ballet, Rome Opera Ballet, Nevada Ballet, and Parsons Dance Company. He has set the work of Alvin Ailey, Earl Mosley, and Jessica Lang on various companies around the world. Television appearances as a guest artist include So You Think You Can Dance and Dancing with the Stars. Mr. Brown rejoined the Company in 2017 and is the Assistant Rehearsal Director.

KHALIA CAMPBELL
(Bronx, NY) is a graduate of Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. She began her formal dance training at Uptown Dance Academy. Ms. Campbell also studied at Dance Theatre of Harlem and as a scholarship student at The Aliley School. In 2012 she performed in Elton John and Tim Rice’s Broadway musical Aida (international tour in Taiwan). She has performed with Kymera Dance, Dance Iquail, and in the 40th anniversary of The Wiz at SummerStage. Ms. Campbell also danced as a guest artist with Richard Siegal’s Ballet of Difference in Munich, Germany. She was recognized in Dance Magazine’s “25 to Watch” in 2020 and is a 2021 dance fellowship recipient from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA. Ms. Campbell was also featured in Katie Couric’s segment of Thank You Notes alongside Judith Jamison. She was a member of Aliley II and joined the Company in 2018.
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

PATRICK COKER

(Chester, VA) grew up in a military family stationed in many places across the country. He was awarded the American Ballet Theatre’s National Trainee Scholarship from 2008 to 2010. In May 2014, Mr. Coker graduated magna cum laude from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program, where he apprenticed with Ailey II in his final year. After graduation, he danced for Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet and went on to join Jessica Lang Dance. He has also performed with The Mark Morris Dance Group in The Hard Nut and L’Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato; Earl Mosley’s Diversity of Dance; and LA-based BODYTRAFFIC. He was one of Jessica Lang’s rehearsal associates in the creation of her ballet EN for the Ailey company in 2018. Mr. Coker joined the Company in 2019. Instagram: @pcoke

CAROLINE T. DARTEY

(Geneva, Switzerland) trained in rhythmic gymnastics in her hometown at the age of five, eventually rising to national and international levels and becoming the Swiss champion in her category from 2009 to 2011. She later began dancing at the Conservatoire Populaire de Musique, Danse et Théâtre of Geneva. Ms. Dartey also trained at The Ailey School as a scholarship student and performed in Alvin Ailey's Memoria during Ailey’s 2017 New York City Center season. She was a member of Ailey II from 2018 to 2020 and has performed works choreographed by Darrell Grand Moultrie, Uri Sands, Bradley Shelves, Troy Powell, Robert Battle, Amy Hall Garner, Kirven Douthit-Boyd, Andrea Miller, Alia Kache, and Yannick Lebrun. Ms. Dartey joined the Company in 2021. Instagram: @caroline_dartey

SARAH DALEY-PERDOMO

(South Elgin, IL) began her training at the Faubourg School of Ballet in Illinois under the direction of Watmora Casey and Tatyana Mazur. She is a 2009 graduate of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in Dance. Mrs. Daley-Perdomo trained at institutions such as the Kirov Academy, National Ballet School of Canada, The San Francisco Conservatory of Dance, and intensives at Ballet Camp Illinois and Ballet Adriatico in Italy. Ms. Daley-Perdomo was honored to be highlighted in Dance Magazine’s “On the Rise” feature in 2014, and to perform in Wayne McGregor’s Chroma for the filming of Lincoln Center at the Movies: Great American Dance. She is a recipient of a Youth America Grand Prix Award and an ARTS Foundation Award. She was a member of Ailey II and joined the Company in 2011.

GHRAI DEVORE-STOKES

(Washington, D.C.) trained at the Kirov Academy, Ballet Chicago, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, and Alonzo King’s LINES Ballet. She began her professional career with Chicago-based dance company Hubbard Street 2, and was a member of Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater 2, Dance Works Chicago, and Ailey II. Ms. DeVore-Stokes was the 2011 recipient of the Danish Queen Ingrid Scholarship of Honor and a 2009 recipient of the Dizzy Feet Foundation Scholarship. She was also a 2010 nominee for the first annual Clive Barnes Award. Her film credits include Swamp Lake and Codeswitch. She has modeled for Lululemon and Vogue. Ms. DeVore-Stokes joined the Company in 2010. She would like to thank The Creator from whom all blessings flow. Instagram: @ghrai_
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

SOLOMON DUMAS

(Chicago, IL) (he, him, his) was introduced to dance through AileyCamp. He later began his formal training at The Chicago Academy for the Arts and the Russell Talbort Dance Studio, where he received his most influential training. Mr. Dumas studied at New World School of the Arts and was a Fellowship Level 1 student at The Ailey School. He has performed with companies including Garth Fagan Dance; Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, A Dance Company; and Labyrinth Dance Theater. Mr. Dumas was a member of Aliey II and joined the Company in 2016. Instagram: @solemn_on

VERNARD J. GILMORE

(Pittsburgh, PA) trained at Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre School and the Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School. After graduating, he performed with Texture Contemporary Ballet and joined Cincinnati Ballet in 2011. While dancing with the Cincinnati Ballet for six seasons, Mr. Gilmer was promoted to Soloist in 2015 and performed works by Victoria Morgan, Amy Seiwert, Septime Webre, Ohad Naharin, Val Caniparoli, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Edward Liang, Jennifer Archibald, and George Balanchine to name a few. Mr. Gilmer was also a member of Amy Seiwert’s Imagery, performing during the summer seasons since 2013, and ODC/dance, performing works by Brenda Way, KT Nelson, and Kate Weare. In November 2021 he will perform in Twyla Now, New York City Center’s celebration of choreographer Twyla Tharp. Mr. Gilmer joined the Company.

SAMANTHA FIGGINS

(Washington, D.C.) began dancing at Duke Ellington School of the Arts under the tutelage of Charles Auggins and Sandra Fortune-Greene and attended summer intensives at Dance Theatre of Harlem under Arthur Mitchell. She continued her education at SUNY Purchase Conservatory of Dance, performing works by George Balanchine, Bill T. Jones, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp. Upon graduating cum laude, Ms. Figgins became a member of Complexions Contemporary Ballet, performing works by Dwight Rhoden, Jae Man Joo, and Camille A. Brown. She performed at the 2014 DanceOpen Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia. Ms. Figgins was featured both on the cover of Dance Spirit magazine and in Pointe magazine’s “10 Careers to Watch”. She has worked with Beyoncé and in the film Enemy Within alongside Tiler Peck and Matthew Rushing. Ms. Figgins had the pleasure of performing with Judith Jamison for TEDTalk 2019. Ms. Figgins joined the Company in 2014. Follow her on Instagram @sfigg_udigg.

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(Pittsburgh, PA) trained at Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre School and the Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School. After graduating, he performed with Texture Contemporary Ballet and joined Cincinnati Ballet in 2011. While dancing with the Cincinnati Ballet for six seasons, Mr. Gilmer was promoted to Soloist in 2015 and performed works by Victoria Morgan, Amy Seiwert, Septime Webre, Ohad Naharin, Val Caniparoli, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Edward Liang, Jennifer Archibald, and George Balanchine to name a few. Mr. Gilmer was also a member of Amy Seiwert’s Imagery, performing during the summer seasons since 2013, and ODC/dance, performing works by Brenda Way, KT Nelson, and Kate Weare. In November 2021 he will perform in Twyla Now, New York City Center’s celebration of choreographer Twyla Tharp. Mr. Gilmer joined the Company.

SAMANTHA FIGGINS

(Washington, D.C.) began dancing at Duke Ellington School of the Arts under the tutelage of Charles Auggins and Sandra Fortune-Greene and attended summer intensives at Dance Theatre of Harlem under Arthur Mitchell. She continued her education at SUNY Purchase Conservatory of Dance, performing works by George Balanchine, Bill T. Jones, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp. Upon graduating cum laude, Ms. Figgins became a member of Complexions Contemporary Ballet, performing works by Dwight Rhoden, Jae Man Joo, and Camille A. Brown. She performed at the 2014 DanceOpen Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia. Ms. Figgins was featured both on the cover of Dance Spirit magazine and in Pointe magazine’s “10 Careers to Watch”. She has worked with Beyoncé and in the film Enemy Within alongside Tiler Peck and Matthew Rushing. Ms. Figgins had the pleasure of performing with Judith Jamison for TEDTalk 2019. Ms. Figgins joined the Company in 2014. Follow her on Instagram @sfigg_udigg.

VERNARD J. GILMORE

(Chicago, IL) began his training at Curie Performing and Creative Arts High School in Chicago under Diane Holda. He later studied at the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theater with Harriet Ross, Marquita Levy, and Emily Stein. He received first place in the all-city NAACP ACT- SO competition in 1993. He attended Barat College under scholarship and tutelage of Rory Foster and Eileen Cropley. He then studied as a scholarship student at The Ailey School and was a member of Aliey II. In 2010 he performed as part of the White House Dance Series. Mr. Gilmore is a choreographer whose work has been a part of the Ailey Dancers Resource Fund, Fire Island Dance Festival 2008, Jazz Foundation of America Gala 2010, and he produced the Dance Of Light project in 2010 and 2015. An excerpt of Mr. Gilmore’s work La Muette was performed in 2017 as part of the “Celebrating the Men of Ailey” program. Nimbus Dance Works performed a new work by Mr. Gilmore in 2018. Mr. Gilmore is a certified Zena Rommett Floor-Barre instructor. He teaches workshops and master classes around the world. Mr. Gilmore joined the Company in 1997.
ASHLEY KAYLYNN GREEN
(Charleston, SC) began her training at Dance Explosion Arts Center where she found her love for dance. She trained in a variety of styles including ballet, modern, jazz, tap, and hip-hop. In 2020, Ms. Green received her BFA in Dance from Point Park University in Pittsburgh, PA, under the direction of Garfield Lemonius. There, she performed works by Peter Chu, Aszure Barton, Kyle Abraham, and Darrell Grand Moultrie. Prior to joining the Company in 2021, she danced with Whim W’Him Seattle Contemporary Dance.

JACQUELINE GREEN
(Baltimore, MD) began her dance training at age 13 at the Baltimore School for the Arts. She is a 2011 cum laude graduate of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program, and also trained at the Pennsylvania Regional Ballet, the Chautauqua Institution for Dance, and The School at Jacob’s Pillow. She has performed works by choreographers including Wayne McGregor, Jiří Kylián, Ronald K. Brown, and Kyle Abraham. In 2016 she performed as a guest artist with The Royal Ballet. Ms. Green is a 2018 “Bessie” Award nominee for sustained achievement, a 2015 Clive Barnes Award nominee, a 2014 dance fellowship recipient from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA, a 2010 recipient of the Dizzy Feet Foundation Scholarship, and a 2009 recipient of the Martha Hill Fund’s Young Professional Award. In 2018 she performed on BET’s Black Girls Rock honoring Judith Jamison. She was a member of Al In and joined the Company in 2011. Instagram: @JaGreen711

JACQUELIN HARRIS
(Charlotte, NC) began her dance training at Dance Productions Studios under the direction of Lori Long. Ms. Harris received a silver ARTS award from the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts and was a Presidential Scholar in the Arts semifinalist. She graduated with honors from the Al Green BFA Program in Dance. In 2016 Ms. Harris was named one of “25 to Watch” by Dance Magazine. She received a 2017 dance fellowship from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA. In 2019 she was one of 75 dancers across the world to perform in Merce Cunningham’s Night of 100 Solos: A Centennial Event, which won a New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award. In 2021 Ms. Harris worked with Twyla Tharp in her production of Twyla Now alongside artists of New York City Ballet and American Ballet Theatre. She was a member of Al II and joined the Company in 2014.

MICHAEL JACKSON, JR.
(New Orleans, LA) began his dance training at age 14 at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, D.C., under the direction of Charles Augins. He became a member of Dance Theatre of Harlem Dancing through Barriers Ensemble in 2005. In 2006 he joined Dallas Black Dance Theatre, and in 2008 joined PHILADANCO!, where he also worked as artistic director of D3. Mr. Jackson joined the Company in 2011 and rejoined in 2015.
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

YAZZMEEN LAIDLER
(Miami, FL) graduated from New World School of the Arts. She trained at Traci Young-Bryon’s Young Contemporary Dance Theatre and The Ailey School summer intensive. Ms. Laidler received her BFA from The University of the Arts and was a company member of Eleone Dance Theatre. Ms. Laidler is the 2016 award-winning Pennsylvania Choreographer, setting work for Pennsylvania Ballet II. She has performed works by Dwight Rhoden, Camille A. Brown, Rennie Harris, and Azure Barton, among others. She has performed as a guest artist with Owen/Cox Dance and is a former member of Ailey II. She is the founder of Time Revealed Dance Intensive in Miami, FL, which brings highly acclaimed artists to aid in the cultivation of community for aspiring dancers. Ms. Laidler joined the company in 2018. Instagram: @yazzmeen.laidler

RENALDO MAURICE
(Gary, IN) began his training with Tony Washington and graduated from Talent Unlimited High School. He attended Emerson School for Visual and Performing Arts, studying with Larry Brewer and Michael Davis. Mr. Maurice was a scholarship student at The Ailey School, Ballet Chicago, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, and Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance. He received second place in modern dance from the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts and received the Dizzy Feet Foundation Scholarship. In 2012 he was honored with the key to the city of his hometown. Mr. Maurice has choreographed and performed with Grammy nominated artist Jazzmeia Horn. He has also incorporated his passion for the arts with social responsibility as the co-artistic director of the South Shore Dance Alliance in Indiana. He was a member of Ailey II, joined the company in 2011, and rejoined in 2019. Facebook: @Maurice Gardner. Instagram: @mauricerenaldo

YANNICK LEBRUN
(Cayenne, French Guiana) began training in his native country at the Adaclam School under the guidance of Jeanine Verin. After graduating high school in 2004, he moved to New York City to study at The Ailey School as a scholarship student. Mr. Lebrun was named one of Dance Magazine’s “25 to Watch” in 2011, and in 2013 France-Amérique magazine highlighted him as one of the 50 most talented French people in the United States. In November 2016 Mr. Lebrun was a guest performer with The Royal Ballet in Wayne McGregor’s Chroma. In 2019 he choreographed Saa Magni, his first work for Ailey II, and in 2021 he created Lora for ABT Studio Company. Mr. Lebrun was a member of Ailey II and joined the Company in 2008.

ASHLEY MAYEUX
(Houston, TX) began her dance training at the High School for Performing and Visual Arts and graduated cum laude with a BFA from SUNY Purchase. Ms. Mayeux continued her studies at the Dance Theatre of Harlem and went on to perform in the tour of the Broadway musical Aida. She has been featured in publications including The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, Pointe Magazine, and Dance Magazine. Ms. Mayeux was a member of Complexions Contemporary Ballet from 2012 to 2016, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from 2016 to 2018, and Alonzo King LINES Ballet from 2018-2021. She rejoined the Ailey company in 2021. Instagram: @Courtesy_ofhtwn
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

CORRIN RACHELLE MITCHELL
(Baltimore, MD) began her dance training in her hometown at LeRe’s Performing Arts Center, owned by her mother and father. She attended Baltimore School for the Arts where she trained with Norma Pera and Linda-Denise Fisher-Harrell. Ms. Mitchell graduated from Point Park University in 2017 with a B.F.A. in Dance where she worked with choreographers Troy Powell, Garfield Lemonius, and Debbie Allen. After completing one year of apprenticeship, Ms. Mitchell joined Ailey II in 2017 where she performed works choreographed by Uri Sands, Bradley Shelver, Troy Powell, Robert Battle, Darrell Grand Moultrie, and Amy Hall. Ms. Mitchell joined the Company in 2019. Instagram: @corrinrachellemitchell

BELÉN INDIHIRA PEREYRA
(Lawrence, MA) began her formal training at Boston Arts Academy, where she graduated as valedictorian, and was a member of NIA Dance Troupe at Origination Cultural Arts Center. Upon moving to NYC, Ms. Pereyra was closely mentored by Earl Mosley and danced with Camille A. Brown & Dancers, during which time she performed at The Joyce Theater, Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival, and Dancers Responding to AIDS’ annual events Dance from the Heart and The Fire Island Dance Festival. Ms. Pereyra was an apprentice for Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, A Dance Company, and has performed with Lula Washington Dance Theater, Nathan Trice, and Roger C. Jeffrey. She has been featured in Dance Magazine, Island Origins Magazine, Boston Magazine, and the Improper Bostonian. Ms. Pereyra is also certified in SAFE® FLOOR, is a Zena Rommett Floor-Barre™ teacher, and a WISDOM coach for children. She assisted Matthew Rushing with Uptown for the Company in 2009 and joined in 2011. Instagram: @mirandaming4

CHALVAR MONTEIRO
(Montclair, NJ) began training at Sharron Miller’s Academy for the Performing Arts and went on to study at The Ailey School before receiving his BFA in Dance from SUNY Purchase. Mr. Monteiro has worked with Sidra Bell Dance New York, Elisa Monte Dance, Keigwin + Company, BODYTRAFFIC, and A.I.M by Kyle Abraham. He assisted Kyle Abraham in setting and creating work for Barnard College, Princeton University, Emory University, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and Wendy Whelan’s Restless Creature. In 2019 Mr. Monteiro was selected to participate in Merce Cunningham Trust’s Night of 100 Solos: A Centennial Event. His choreography has been presented as part of Ailey’s 2021 Virtual Spirit Gala, as well as at other festivals and institutions across the U.S. Mr. Monteiro is currently on faculty at Tisch School of the Arts at NYU. He was in Ailey II and joined the Company in 2015. Instagram: @chlvrmntro

MIRANDA QUINN
(Baltimore, MD) trained in various genres of dance from the ages of 2 to 18 at Mid-Atlantic Center for the Performing Arts under the artistic direction of Shannon Torres. Ms. Quinn graduated from The Juilliard School in 2019 under the newly appointed direction of Alicia Graf Mack. Her attendance at the school was made possible by the Jerome L. Greene Fellowship. She is an alum of the Springboard Danse Montréal, Arts Umbrella, and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago Summer Intensives. She joined the Company in 2019. Ms. Quinn is beyond thrilled and honored to be a part of the Ailey family and legacy and hopes you enjoy Ailey’s return to live theater! Instagram: @mirandaming4
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

JERMAINE TERRY
(Washington, D.C.) began his dance training in Kissimmee, Florida, at James Dance Center. He graduated cum laude with a BFA in dance performance from the University of South Florida, where he received scholarships for excellence in performance and choreography.

Mr. Terry also received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from USF for outstanding service to the arts. Mr. Terry was a scholarship student at The Ailey School and a member of Ailey II. He has performed with Buglisi Dance Theatre, Arch Dance, Dance Iquail, PHILADANCO!, and as a guest artist on the TV show So You Think You Can Dance. He has designed costumes for New York City Ballet, Ailey II, PHILADANCO!, and The Black Iris Project, to name a few. His eveningwear designs have been in Essence online and photographed by the late Bill Cunningham for the style section of The New York Times. Mr. Terry joined the Company in 2010. Instagram: @Jerms83.

KANJI SEGAWA
(Kanagawa, Japan) began his dance training with his mother Erika Akoh, studying ballet with Kan Horiuchi and Ju Horiuchi in Tokyo. In 1997 Mr. Segawa came to the U.S. under the Japanese Government Artist Fellowship to train at The Ailey School. He was a member of Ailey II from 2000 to 2002 and Battleworks from 2002 to 2010. Mr. Segawa worked extensively with Mark Morris from 2004 to 2011, appearing with Mark Morris Dance Group and as a principal dancer in John Adams’ Nixon in China at The Metropolitan Opera. He is a master teacher and choreographs for companies and educational institutions. His work Future premiered during Alley’s 2021 Virtual Spirit Gala. Since 1999 Mr. Segawa has been Creative Associate for Jessica Lang, assisting her creations for companies including American Ballet Theatre, Pacific Northwest Ballet, The Washington Ballet, and The National Ballet of Japan. Mr. Segawa joined the Company in 2011. www.kanjisegawa.com

CONSTANCE STAMATIOUS
(Charlotte, NC) began her dance training at Pat Hall’s Dance Unlimited and North Carolina Dance Theatre under the direction of Salvatore Aiello. She graduated from Northwest School of the Arts and studied at SUNY Purchase and as a Fellowship student at The Ailey School. In 2009 Ms. Stamatiou received the Leonore Annenberg Fellowship in the performing and visual arts. She has performed at the White House Dance Series, in a TED Talk with Judith Jamison, and has been a guest performer on So You Think You Can Dance, Dancing with the Stars, Logo’s Trailblazer Honors, Good Morning America and The Today Show. Ms. Stamatiou has danced in the films Shake Rattle & Roll and Dan Pritzker’s Bolden and the commercial I Love NY. She is a mother of two. Ms. Stamatiou was a member of Ailey II, joined the Company in 2007, and rejoined in 2016. Instagram: @constance.stamatiou

COURTNEY CELESTE SPEARS
(Baltimore, MD), of Bahamian descent, began formal training at the Baltimore School for the Arts under the direction of Norma Pera. She was the 2015 Denise Jefferson Memorial Scholar and graduated summa cum laude with honors from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in Dance with degrees in dance and communications. Ms. Spears attended summer intensives at The Juilliard School and American Ballet Theatre. She is a 2015 Princess Grace Award recipient, the 2020 Shirley Hall Bass Legacy Award Recipient, and the Co-Founder & Director of ArtSea Dance, an outreach and dance management company based in the Bahamas. Ms. Spears is currently signed with Wilhelmina Models and graduated from Harvard Business School’s “Crossover Into Business” program. She continues to serve as a mentor by Co-Directing the Ailey Student Ailey Professional Mentor Program for The Ailey School. She was a member of Ailey II and joined the Company in 2018. Instagram: @bahamaballerina

JERMAINE TERRY
(Washington, D.C.) began his dance training in Kissimmee, Florida, at James Dance Center. He graduated cum laude with a BFA in dance performance from the University of South Florida, where he received scholarships for excellence in performance and choreography. He also received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from USF for outstanding service to the arts. Mr. Terry was a scholarship student at The Ailey School and a member of Ailey II. He has performed with Buglisi Dance Theatre, Arch Dance, Dance Iquail, PHILADANCO!, and as a guest artist on the TV show So You Think You Can Dance. He has designed costumes for New York City Ballet, Ailey II, PHILADANCO!, and The Black Iris Project, to name a few. His eveningwear designs have been in Essence online and photographed by the late Bill Cunningham for the style section of The New York Times. Mr. Terry joined the Company in 2010. Instagram: @Jerms83.
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

CHRISTOPHER R. WILSON

(Augusta, GA) is a graduate of John S. Davidson Fine Arts Magnet School and graduated cum laude from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in Dance. He trained at Colton Ballet School, Alonzo King’s LINES Ballet, and The School at Jacob’s Pillow. He began his professional career with BHdos, the second company of Ballet Hispánico, and has performed for Queen Sofia of Spain and Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands. He has had the privilege of performing on the main stage of the 2017 Essence Festival in New Orleans. Mr. Wilson has performed works by choreographers Judith Jamison, Matthew Rushing, Wayne McGregor, Camille A. Brown, Kyle Abraham, and Emily Molnar, among others. He has been a guest artist with The Black Iris Project and for the Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival. Mr. Wilson was a member of Aliley II and joined the Company in 2018. Website: www.christopherrwilson.com. Instagram: @christopher.r.wilson

BRANDON MICHAEL WOOLRIDGE

(Spring Hill, FL) began his dance training at John Leggio’s Center for the Performing Arts at age 11 in his hometown, where he first learned about the Company’s legacy through Ailey Arts In Education. He graduated from F.W. Springstead High School and performed in a production of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at the Show Palace Dinner Theatre. Mr. Woolridge trained at The Ailey School as a scholarship student where he performed works by choreographers Ronald K. Brown, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Earl Mosley, and Troy Powell and appeared in Alvin Ailey’s Memoria during Aliley’s 60th Anniversary season at New York City Center. He was briefly a member of Aliley II before joining the Company in 2019.
AILEY MILESTONES

1958 - Alvin Ailey, who believed passionately that “dance belongs to everyone,” and a group of young black dancers perform for the first time as members of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at New York’s 92nd Street Y.

1960 - Alvin Ailey choreographs his classic masterpiece Revelations, which brings international acclaim. During the organization’s first 10 years, Ailey created 20 new ballets; during his lifetime, he choreographed 79 ballets.

1962 - AAADT is chosen to go on an extensive tour to the Far East, Southeast Asia and Australia as part of President John F. Kennedy’s progressive “President’s Special International Program for Cultural Presentations.”

1965 - Judith Jamison joins Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and becomes widely recognized as an international dance star.

1967 - AAADT embarks on a 3-month, 10-country African Tour for the State Department.

1968 - AAADT performs for President Johnson at the White House.

1969 - Alvin Ailey founds The Aliley School.

1970 - AAADT’s second State Department-sponsored tour of North Africa and Europe. AAADT also tours the USSR – the first visit by an American modern dance company since the days of Isadora Duncan. The Washington Post reports that the Company was kept onstage for 20 minutes of curtain calls after a sold-out opening night in Moscow.

1971 - Alvin Ailey choreographs Cry for Judith Jamison as a birthday present to his mother. Cry becomes an instant hit, bringing even greater popularity to Mr. Ailey as a choreographer and Ms. Jamison as a dancer.

1974 - Alley II is founded to develop young artists and new dance audiences.

CBS airs “Alley Celebrates Ellington,” Alvin Ailey’s dance tribute to the American jazz legend.

1977 - AAADT performs at the inaugural gala for President Jimmy Carter at the White House.


1983 - AAADT celebrates its 25th anniversary with an anniversary benefit The New York Times calls “the biggest celebration of all” and further proclaims that “The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is not just a company, it is a school of thought.”

1985 - AAADT is the first modern dance company to go on a US government-sponsored tour of the People’s Republic of China since the normalization of Sino-American relations.

1988 - Alvin Ailey receives The Kennedy Center Honors for Lifetime Contributions to American Culture through the Performing Arts and New York’s City’s highest cultural honor – the Handel Medallion.

1989 - Upon Alvin Ailey’s death and at his request, Judith Jamison is named Artistic Director. Under her leadership, the company flourishes, building an unparalleled reputation for performance, education, and innovation.

Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey is founded and subsequently launches the Company’s national AlleyCamp program.

1991 - AlleyCamp established in New York City. This program is successfully replicated in cities nationwide and continues to inspire thousands of inner-city youth.
1994 – AAADT performs at the televised inaugural gala for President Bill Clinton, seen by 80 million viewers, and was featured on The Phil Donahue Show, reaching 18 million viewers.

Judith Jamison’s autobiography, Dancing Spirit, edited by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, is published by Doubleday.

Ailey in the Park attracts 30,000 spectators, who congregate in New York City’s Central Park to see the live performance.

1995 – Judith Jamison and the Company are featured in a commercial broadcast on the Academy Awards and Super Bowl telecasts as part of a very successful American Express ad campaign. Advertising Age calls it “the campaign of the decade.”


1997 – Historic AAADT residency in South Africa, signaling the end to a long cultural boycott of the old apartheid regime by the world performing arts community.

1998 – The Ailey organization pioneers its new B.F.A. program – a joint venture between the Ailey and Fordham University, which offers students a unique opportunity to receive both superb dance training and a superior liberal arts education.

1999 – Judith Jamison receives The Kennedy Center Honors for Lifetime Contributions to American Culture through the Performing Arts.

Orlando Bagwell’s documentary “A Hymn for Alvin Alley” is broadcast nationally on PBS’ Great Performances, inspired by Judith Jamison’s work Hymn, her powerful tribute to Alvin Ailey, in collaboration with Tony nominee Anna Deavere Smith. Judith Jamison wins a Prime Time Emmy Award in the category of Outstanding Choreography.

2002 – President George W. Bush awards the 2001 National Medal of Arts to both Judith Jamison and the Alvin Alley Dance Foundation. The Foundation is the first dance organization in history to be given this prestigious award and it is the first time ever than an arts organization and its artistic director have been recognized independently for this honor.

Judith Jamison carries the Olympic torch in Salt Lake City, UT prior to the opening of the 2002 Winter Olympics. AAADT performs Jamison’s HERE...NOW, commissioned for the Olympic Arts Festival.

2003 – AAADT performs at the White House State Dinner honoring President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya.

2004 – The United States Postal Service issues a first class postage stamp honoring Alvin Alley as part of the American Choreographers stamp series, which commemorates four visionary 20th century choreographers who left a profound mark on the language of dance.


AAADT returns to Russia, becoming the only American company to perform in the Stars of the White Nights Festival and the first modern dance company presented at the legendary Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg.

Launch of The Alley Extension, a new program for the general public that offers “real classes for real people” with a variety of techniques taught morning, noon and night.
2006 - The Library of Congress announces the donation of the Ailey archives to "the nation’s library," which will preserve the materials, digitize them and make them more widely available to future generations. According to Librarian of Congress James H. Billington, it is "...a major achievement for the Library."

PBS Dance in America’s Beyond the Steps: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which chronicles the 2005 tour to Russia, the Ailey organization’s move into its new home and the creation of the acclaimed ballet Love Stories, premieres.

2007 – AAADT is featured on The Oprah Winfrey Show and the season opening of The Ellen DeGeneres Show.

2008 – The Ailey organization launches its 50th anniversary celebration with 18 months of special performances, projects and events, including: The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. opens the exhibit Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: 50 Years as Cultural Ambassador to the World. AAADT is the first concert dance company to perform on ABC’s Dancing With the Stars and FOX’s So You Think You Can Dance. The Ailey organization creates special commemorative merchandise in celebration of the 50th anniversary including a Barbie® Doll, Hallmark greeting cards, a Movado Museum Timepiece, and a photographic art book Alvin Ailey Ascending: A Portrait in Motion by renowned photographer Andrew Eccles. Ailey holds free summer performances in all five boroughs of New York City, including a street party on 55th street in front of New York City Center. An estimated 40,000 people attend one of these events. AAADT launches its five-week 50th Anniversary Season at New York City Center with a Golden Anniversary Gala with Honorary Chair Oprah Winfrey. The season includes special live performances with Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and Sweet Honey in the Rock. The US Congress passes a resolution naming Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater a vital American "Cultural Ambassador to the World."

2009 – AAADT kicks off its 50th Anniversary U.S. Tour to 26 cities in Washington, D.C. where President Obama and the First Family attend a performance at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

2010 – Tracy Inman and Melanie Person become co-directors of The Ailey School, succeeding the late Denise Jefferson, who led the School for about 25 years.

First Lady Michelle Obama honors Ms. Jamison at The White House Dance Series: A Tribute to Judith Jamison, celebrating her career as an American dancer, choreographer and Artistic Director of the Company for the past 20 years.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg presents Judith Jamison with highest honor awarded by the City of New York – the Handel Medallion for distinguished achievement in the arts.

2011 – During Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s 2011 International Tour Judith Jamison passes the mantle of Artistic Director to Robert Battle on July 1, 2011. He becomes only the third person in the Company’s history to hold that position.

Robert Battle initiates a major new program: The New Directions Choreography Lab, designed to serve the entire field of dance. Assisting choreographers in developing their work, the program will grant resident fellowships to four emerging and mid career artists each year, offering a stipend, the use of gifted dancers from The Ailey School, creative mentorships and rehearsal time at The Joan Weill Center for Dance.

AlleyCamp Newark launches to provide at-risk youth ages 11-14 with activities that build self-esteem, encourage creative expression, and impart life skills such as goal-setting, self-discipline, and teamwork. AlleyCamps operate in ten sites, and engage nearly 1,000 young people across the country: Atlanta, GA; Berkeley/Oakland, CA; Boston, MA; Bridgeport, CT; Chicago, IL; Kansas City, KS; Kansas City, MO; Miami, FL; Newark, NJ; New York City.
AILEY MILESTONES

10-year agreement announced with New York City Center designating Ailey as the venue’s Principal Dance Company and providing financial support for the creation of one new dance work for the Company’s performances at the landmark theater during each of the next ten seasons.

The U.S. Senate passes a resolution recognizing the artistic and cultural contributions of AAADT and the 50th Anniversary of the first performance of Alvin Ailey’s masterwork, Revelations. Authored by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and co-sponsored by Senators Charles E. Schumer and Robert Menendez, this resolution honors Revelations as a timeless classic “beloved by people around the world” with universal themes “that illustrate the strength and humanity within all of us.”

2012 – Launch of the Ailey Legacy Residency – a new lecture, technique and repertory program for college-level students looks definitively into the history and creative heritage of Alvin Ailey – led by Sylvia Waters, who steps down from Artistic Director of Ailey II after 38 years.

Ailey board appoints Bennett Rink as the new Executive Director of Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, succeeding Sharon Gersten Luckman, who planned to step down in January 2013 after over two decades with the organization.

2013 – An historic engagement at Lincoln Center, for the first time in 13 years, launches 2013-14 season led by Robert Battle, which also includes visits to Brazil and Argentina and a record-breaking five-week engagement at New York City Center. Ailey II’s first New York season also breaks box office records.

2014 – Another record-breaking New York City Center Season: for the second consecutive year, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater broke New York City Center season box office records—nearly 70,000 audience members attend a total of 39 performances during the five-week engagement from December 4, 2013 to January 5, 2014.

Ailey II celebrated its 40th anniversary, Performing for approximately 40,000 people in 33 cities worldwide, including five cities across France, Germany, Poland and Luxembourg, and 28 cities in the United States and Canada.

Robert Battle visits the White House to accept from President Obama the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the country’s highest civilian honor posthumously awarded to Alvin Ailey in recognition of his contributions to civil rights and dance in America.

2015 – Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater makes an historic return to South Africa after nearly 20 years, performing in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and leading workshops, master classes, and lecture demonstrations in over two dozen schools, universities, and community centers.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater makes its national cinema debut as part of “Lincoln Center at the Movies: Great American Dance.” Shown on approximately 600 screens across the country, the film includes Chroma by Wayne McGregor, Grace by Ronald K. Brown, Takademe by Robert Battle, and Alvin Ailey’s masterpiece Revelations, along with a rare look behind the scenes and exclusive interviews with the artists.

Simon & Schuster publishes MY STORY, MY DANCE: Robert Battle’s Journey to Alvin Ailey, an inspiring children’s book based on Mr. Battle’s life. His landmark year continues with the December debut of Awakening, his first world premiere since becoming Artistic Director.

2016 – Judith Jamison’s contributions to dance are celebrated at a White House Black History Month event hosted by First Lady Michelle Obama.

AlleyCamp expands to ten cities nationwide, including Atlanta, GA; Baltimore, MD; Berkeley/Oakland, CA; Chicago, IL; Kansas City, KS; Kansas City, MO; Miami, FL; New York, NY; Newark, NJ; and Seattle/Tacoma, WA.
First Lady Michelle Obama recognizes AileyCamp Miami with the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award for being one of the country’s best after-school and out-of-school-time creative youth development programs using engagement in the arts and the humanities to increase academic achievement, graduation rates, and college enrollment.

2016 – Jamar Roberts was awarded a 2016 New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award for Sustained Achievement “for impeccably representing the traditional values of classic modern dance while forging new paths with his sublime artistry, technical precision, and passionate presence with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.”

2017 – Ailey kicks off the pilot year of Destination Dance Alley Atlanta, an initiative that leverages Ailey’s unique position as the nation’s largest culturally diverse dance company to engage audiences, artists, teachers, and students in innovative ways throughout Atlanta, Georgia, in partnership with various cultural, educational, and civic organizations such as The Center for Civil and Human Rights, Atlanta Ballet and High Museum of Art.

Ailey launches its newest curriculum initiative, Night Creature: An Imaginative Journey Through Dance, a program for elementary-age youth in 3rd through 5th grades based on the study of Alvin Ailey’s Night Creature, a fusion of Ailey’s buoyant choreography and Duke Ellington’s sparkling music, using imaginative thinking to provide connections to music, visual arts, social studies, science, and literacy.

Logo Trailblazer Honors recognizes Alvin Ailey as pioneer who bravely fought for equality. Tribute aired nationally on Logo and VHL.

Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation opens The Elaine Wynn & Family Education Wing, a 10,000-square-foot expansion of Ailey’s permanent home, The Joan Weill Center for Dance – New York City’s largest building dedicated to dance. Designed by The Center’s original architects, Iu + Bibliowicz Architects, The Elaine Wynn & Family Education Wing adds three floors to the west side of Ailey’s building to provide four additional dance studios, two new flexible classrooms, and added administrative office space.

Ailey’s Artistic Director Emerita, Judith Jamison, was inducted in November 2017 into the Crain’s Hall of Fame, which honors business leaders who have transformed New York City in their professional work and in their civic and philanthropic activities.

Veteran Ailey company member Linda Celeste Sims was a 2017 recipient of the Dance Magazine Award.

Ailey dancer Jacquelin Harris was a 2017 recipient of the Princess Grace Dance Performance Award.

2018 – In honor of hometown native Jamar Roberts and the Miami premiere of his work Members Don’t Get Weary, the Miami-Dade County Commission presented him with proclamation declaring February 22, 2018 as Jamar Roberts Day. Roberts was also presented with a Key to the City.

Ailey II performed at the opening ceremony of the National Museum for Peace and Justice, the nation’s first comprehensive memorial dedicated to racial terror lynchings of African-Americans and the legacy of slavery and racial inequality in America, and the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, AL in April.
2018 - Ailey believes the transformative power of dance is applicable for all ages and developed the AileyDance for Active Seniors program specifically for people age 60 and older, emphasizing the importance of strength training and mobility through movement while providing an outlet for artistic expression for elderly populations. Pilot residencies were hosted by New Settlement Community Center in the Bronx, and Union Settlement, James Lenox House, and Carnegie East House in Upper Manhattan.

BET and BLACK GIRLS ROCK!™ honor Judith Jamison with the Living Legend Award on national telecast which featured a special performance of Cry danced by Company dancer Jacqueline Green.

Heinemann Publishers created a Guided Reading Book for 1st and 2nd grade students about the Ailey Athletic Boys Dance program, which are being distributed to schools nationwide beginning in the fall of 2018.

The Ailey organization honors Mr. Ailey’s pioneering legacy with a 60th Anniversary celebration titled Ailey Ascending. The celebration consists of an international tour, a Choreography Unlocked festival of performance and master classes, expands to include exceptional discussions and legacy panels at partner institutions throughout New York City, and reaches a high point with a momentous New York City Center Season of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which features the company’s first two-act ballet, Lazarus, created by the organization’s inaugural artist-in-residence Rennie Harris.

2019 - The Ailey Spirit Gala launched The Ailey School 50th anniversary celebration, with a special performance featuring students of all ages. To honor the milestone, one hundred students from the School performed Alvin Alley’s Revelations in the 93rd Annual Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Acclaimed company member Jamar Roberts is named Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s first ever Resident Choreographer and premieres Ode, a powerful and personal meditation on the beauty and fragility of life in a time of growing gun violence. The New York Times praised “his sensuous, full bodied choreography,” and noted that “[Ode’s] honesty says something hopeful about the present and future of this company.”

The Company celebrates beloved Associate Artistic Director Masazumi Chaya’s final New York City Center season with a special performance program after nearly four decades with the Company and took on a new role as Director of the Alvin Ailey Choreographic Legacy Project. Mr. Chaya is honored with the prestigious 2019 Dance Magazine Award, lauded by the magazine as “a diplomat and a direct connection to the Ailey legacy.”

2020 – In January, the Company welcomes Matthew Rushing into the role of Associate Artistic Director, after serving as Rehearsal Director and Guest Artist since 2010 and inspiring Ailey audiences since 1992 with performances that led him to be praised as one of the great male dancers on the American stage.

Since the launch of Ailey All Access in March 2020, Ailey has reached over 46 million people in 121 countries globally with free streaming of full-length ballets from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II repertory for the first time, along with classes, conversations and original short films created by the Ailey dancers. Ailey All Access won TimeOut New York’s “Time In” Archive Treasure award for best archival streaming series and outlets like Vogue and Dance Magazine included works by Ailey artists on their “Best Of” lists for dance films created during the pandemic.
AILEY MILESTONES

2020 – Ailey’s first virtual season, Ailey Forward, reached over 717,000 viewers, with eight unique programs from December 2-31. **Two dance films were created and premiered: A Jam Session for Troubling Times** by Resident Choreographer Jamar Roberts and Testament, a collaboration between Associate Artistic Director Matthew Rushing, Clifton Brown and Yusha-Marie Sorzano, in honor of the 60th anniversary of Ailey’s classic Revelations.

2021 – Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater marks the **50th anniversary of Alvin Alley’s signature solo Cry**, with the streaming of a new video adaptation in May. Choreographed on Artistic Director Emerita Judith Jamison as a birthday present for his mother, Mr. Ailey dedicated the enduring work of American art to “all Black women everywhere–especially our mothers”

In January, director Jamila Wignot’s **powerful AILEY documentary premiered at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival** heralded as a must-see and later in June a Tribeca Film Festival critics pick. This resonant biography of trailblazer Alvin Alley is told through Ailey’s own words, along with interviews with those close to him, and featured evocative archival footage and rarely seen historic performances.

Internationally renowned performer, choreographer, director and multidisciplinary artist Francesca Harper is appointed Ailey II Artistic Director, alongside Rehearsal Director Lakey Evans-Peña. Ms. Harper’s personal connections with Alley are deeply rooted, as she received training at The Alley School while her mother, the late Denise Jefferson directed the program from 1984-2010. She will curate and oversee all aspects of the Company’s artistic and educational initiatives while honoring the traditions, legacy and creative spirit of Alvin Alley.
WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AILEY

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER & ROBERT BATTLE

“Honoring Those Who’ve Made Outstanding Contributions to our Field... Today, the warmth and charm of his pre-curtain speeches and interviews make not just Al in but modern dance feel more accessible for all of us... During Battle’s tenure, the Al company has remained synonymous with authenticity, artistic integrity, inclusive storytelling and culture of the highest quality. Through his steadfast grace, humility, wit and assiduousness, Battle has helped the Al company, 60-plus-years on, to continue evolving, flourishing and growing ever more popular.”


“Marking its return to Chicago after a two-year absence, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was like a phoenix rising from the ashes — a hopeful sign that dance fans might be witnessing a light at the end of this pandemic tunnel.”

Chicago Tribune, Lauren Warnecke – March 4, 2022

“Like a master chef, the selections of his dance offerings spanning a decade are palatable and varied yet complimentary... Battle 10th Anniversary is a well-curated, fast-paced and succinct evening of dance. It celebrates not only what makes the Ailey company so globally revered but also demonstrates Robert Battle’s right to stand alongside his choreographer predecessors, giants like Judith Jamison and Alvin Ailey... Battle’s sampling... is red hot!”

Broadway World, Cindy Sibilsky – December 11, 2021

“Seeing Battle’s work en masse, you both appreciate his distinguished choreography gifts and appreciate all the more how patiently he shelved them in order to serve the greater needs of this massive institution, whose ultimate strength is its dancers. Dance companies, like great works of art, don’t really have eternal life. But under Battle, it feels that way with Al.”

San Francisco Chronicle, Rachel Howard – March 31, 2022

“Battle has brought greater variety to the repertoire and, more recently, found a new choreographer-in-residence, the übertalented Jamar Roberts.”

The New Yorker, Marina Harss – December 6, 2021

“How Alvin Ailey Opened the Eyes of a 12-Year-Old Zadie Smith... Uplift!... and it was a ravishment. Nothing prepares you for the totality of Alvin Ailey: the aural, visual, physical, spiritual beauty... Heaven... Everywhere you looked: sensory pleasure... And each spring, now that I live in New York, I don’t have to go very far at all to get another shot of Al’s soaring delights.”

The New York Times, Zadie Smith – April 8, 2019

“Battle, who carries the mantle of his stewardship with great care, not only to preserve Ailey’s spirit, but also to move the company forward and expand its repertory with new works and commissions from prominent, often groundbreaking choreographers... that legacy is accessibility. Al’s credo was that dance comes from the people and should be given back to them in a way that resonates with their lives. Over the past 60 years, the diversity of the audiences that this company has reached through performance and outreach is unparalleled.”

The Boston Globe, Karen Campbell – April 11, 2019

“Non-profit dance companies face a multitude of challenges — many folding with the death or retirement of their founders or foundering on the rocks of financial duress. A notable exception is the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which has not only survived but has also gone on to become nothing short of an American cultural treasure that remains as popular and artistically relevant as ever.”

Chicago Sun Times, Kyle MacMillan – March 7, 2019

“... has enjoyed an inspiring ascent from hardscrabble origins to a long, still unchallenged reign as America’s most popular dance company...”

The New Yorker, Brian Seibert – December 3, 2018

“The influence and importance of the company, to both the dance world and the culture at large, are wide and multifaceted.”

San Francisco Chronicle, Steven Winn – April 4, 2018

“More so than any other major dance company, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater carries an aura of social, moral and even spiritual righteousness. It’s not just the dancers’ exquisite athleticism and peerless commitment that convey this and transfer such a rush to the audience. It’s also the artistic content, especially when it directly engages with human virtues.”

The Washington Post, Sarah L. Kaufman – February 7, 2018

“If you haven’t seen Alvin Ailey, you haven’t seen dance...the most exciting dance company in the world...”

The Huffington Post, Michael Levin – April 28, 2017

“...some of the greatest modern dancers in the United States, with choreography by masters... Its well never runs dry.”

The Huffington Post, Isa Freeling – June 23, 2015

“It became a place where artists of all races had a home. All that mattered was talent. ... And through him, African-American history was told in a way that it had never been told before -- with passionate, virtuoso dance performances that transfixed audiences worldwide. Alvin said that, ‘Dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people.’ Alvin Ailey delivered, both through his life and through the dance company that will forever bear his name.”

President Barack Obama at the Presidential Medal of Freedom Ceremony, November 24, 2014
ABOUT AILEY

BUK (Aszure Barton)
“...the theatrically brilliant Aszure Barton...”
San Francisco Chronicle, Rachel Howard – March 31, 2022

“...her intensity and originality are always worth watching— not just the large-scale group actions but the moving little gestures, the human gestures, that catch your eye...”

“To busk is to entertain with the body. And so Azure Barton’s exquisite work did just that...”
Medium, Isa Freeling – December 24, 2019

Ella (Robert Battle)
“'Ella' (2008), the title referencing the great jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald, who is featured here at her rollicking, scat-singing best in ‘Air Mail Special (Good Enough to Keep).’ Although this piece lasts just four minutes, it was one of the evening highlights with its fun, high-stepping, show-dance style that could easily be imagined on some Vaudeville stage.”
Chicago Sun Times, Kyle MacMillan – March 4, 2022

For Four (Robert Battle)
“The 7-minute showcase for four dancers set to Wynton Marsalis’s boisterous jazz score in 4/4 time began life as a video streamed in June and reveals a whirlwind of moves...”

“... full-bodied jazz moves with chaîné turns and cabrioles, and somehow it all fit into the robust Wynton Marsalis score.”
Dance Magazine, Wendy Perron – December 10, 2021

“... intriguing. Battle explains that the four-person work “speaks to the pent-up energy over the last year and a half,” and says that it’s a manifestation of being “free to express ourselves.” With all its spinning and attitudinizing to a jazz track by Wynton Marsalis, it can seem like simple release. But there’s also a darker, more desperate undertone, a hint of having to perform.”
The New York Times, Brian Seibert – June 24, 2021

“In/Side (Robert Battle)
“Memories of waiting out deadly hurricanes, brought forward through Nina Simone’s song “Wild Is the Wind,” Battle said, set the tone as “In/Side” reveals the internal struggle of “that young, fearful person trying to express himself.”
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Cynthia Bond Perry – February 7, 2022

Love Stories finale (Robert Battle)
“‘Love Stories,’ is straight-up groove... for a pastiche of jazzy, soulful moves that tug at the diasporic roots of Ailey’s modern dance.”
Chicago Tribune, Lauren Warnecke – March 4, 2022

“Excerpt from Love Stories, set to music by Stevie Wonder, is a fun celebration of Black dance... The most delightful part was where lights come down from the ceiling and the dancers turn and bow toward the back of the stage, as though the audience was really there. Perhaps we’d all been part of this return to dance celebration the whole time.”
The Philadelphia Inquirer, Ellen Dunkel – January 29, 2022

“... he [Battle] unleashes a torrent of wild revelry.”
Dance Magazine, Wendy Perron – December 10, 2021

“... the big, soulful group finale... celebratory and unabashedly joyous.”
Broadway World, Cindy Sibilsky – December 11, 2021

Mass (Robert Battle)
“...one of Battle’s best — really snapped into place for me with its powerful unison phrase clustered at center-center, with dancer Jeroboam Bozeman as the de facto leader of these passionate parishioners, his robe accented by a large black cross extending from his shoulder to his ankle...”
Chicago Tribune, Lauren Warnecke – March 4, 2022 (Jeroboam Bozeman in Battle’s Mass)
Revelations (Alvin Ailey)
“I think that every American owes it to him and herself to see the Alvin Ailey troupe perform Revelations. It is an American phenomenon. You know, It’s like Norman Rockwell — and then there’s Alvin Ailey. I’ve probably seen it countless times and every time it’s magical, spiritual and hopeful — everything that we want ourselves to be and hope that our country will be. So, it was an extraordinary evening to be able to see that. I can’t even believe bodies do that.”
Oprah Winfrey to Entertainment Tonight [on attending the AAADT 50th Anniversary Gala] – December 3, 2008

“...Classic “Revelations” feeds the soul... Alvin Ailey’s “Revelations” is back in the flesh — and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is dancing it as rousingly as ever. If you've never seen “Revelations,” or haven't gotten a dose in a few years, make haste to the Ailey company’s current run...this eternal and indestructible 1960 classic... And brace yourself; as one longtime fan was heard telling a newcomer on opening night Thursday, March 29, “You’re about to go to church.””
San Francisco Chronicle, Rachel Howard – March 31, 2022

“If there’s one dance experience that never fails to inspire, it’s Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s “Revelations,””
San Francisco Chronicle, Rachel Howard – March 28, 2022

“The centrality of Revelations in the repertory of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is like nothing else in dance. Ballet companies may perform The Nutcracker every winter; the Ailey troupe performs Revelations on nearly every program, the whole year through. It’s the blueprint for most other works the company dances and the standard against which they’re all judged. It’s the perennial billboard for the company’s brand and its bible, too...the spiritual sustenance this company provides, and not just in “Revelations.””
The New York Times, Brian Seibert – December 18, 2020

“...Revelations captures the urgency and the yearning expressed in spirituals such as ‘Fix Me Jesus’ and ‘I Wanna Be Ready’. Like all great art, it never gets old. In fact, in recent years, with civil rights at the forefront of our national conscience, its power has only grown.”
The New Yorker, Marina Harss – December 7, 2020

“Still, We Dance: Why Alvin Ailey’s Revelations is More Vital Than Ever: ...Against the backdrop of both a global pandemic that disproportionately ravages communities of color and the urgency of social justice movements including Black Lives Matter, Ailey’s valentine to the spirituals of his youth is its own call to action, an ode to the deliverance of self-expression in the face of adversity... That sense of history’s long arc is not just an element of Revelations, it is woven into the fabric of a company born out of the civil rights movement to offer hope, strength, and the balm of beauty.”

“However successful the new piece, or others in the company’s broad repertoire, nothing will ever take the place of Revelations, which more than a signature work is the very core of the company’s identity...”
The Associated Press, Jocelyn Noveck – December 20, 2018

“evergreen masterpiece that never seems to age.”
The Boston Globe, Karen Campbell – March 24, 2018

“guarantees a standing ovation, as its gospel score and images of strength and fellowship build to a roar that engulfs you and lifts you, no matter how many times you’ve seen it.”
The Washington Post, Sarah L. Kaufman – February 7, 2018

“Revelations — one of the great works of the American spirit, whose vision still speaks powerfully...”

Unfold (Robert Battle)
“Battle’s sensuous, swirling duet, “Unfold” evokes the tenderness and ecstasy in Gustave Charpentier’s aria “Depuis Le Jour” and draws inspiration from the moment Battle first heard the voice of trailblazing opera singer Leontyne Price.”
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Cynthia Bond Perry – February 7, 2022

Takademe (Robert Battle)
“Takademe (1999) never fails to excite. With crackling energy, Kanji Segawa mirrors Sheila Chandra’s staccato stutters, deep exhalations and vocal spurts. A brief, enchanting masterwork...”
Dance Magazine, Wendy Perron – December 10, 2021

“...a mini-tour de force of movement and music visualization.”
DC Metro, Lisa Traiger – February 7, 2022

The River (Alvin Ailey)
“...Ailey at his best, a piece ambitiously structured and wonderfully dynamic... The choreography flows from cool blue to red hot, an adventure in momentum... The company shines.”
The Times, Debra Craine – Sept. 7, 2007

“The most significant and welcome of the run’s freshly revived productions is “The River,” a 1970 collaboration between Ailey and Duke Ellington... a choreographic marvel.”
“Ailey artists are known throughout the industry for their tremendous physical shape and ability.”

“...how fabulously individual the dancers all are. Each is an immediately distinct character...”

“Vernard J. Gilmore, one of the company’s most appealing long-term performers...”
*The New York Times*, Alastair Macaulay – December 13, 2018

“...Sarah Daley-Perdomo projecting equal parts physical strength and emotional vulnerability in “Fix Me, Jesus,” and James Gilmer, Chalvar Monteiro and Kanji Segawa racing like tornadoes through “Sinner Man.””
*San Francisco Chronicle*, Rachel Howard – March 31, 2022

“Company veteran Yannick Lebrun gave a marvelous performance in “In/Side,” a solo to Nina Simone singing “Wild is the Wind,” twisting and contorting as if emotional agony were literally turning him inside out.”
*Artburst Miami*, Jordan Levin – March 3, 2022

“Ghrai DeVore-Stokes breaks into the first solo, tracing the edge of the stage, her movements alternately frenzied and robotic, powered as all the movement is in the program by that unshakable strength of the Ailey-trained core.”
*San Francisco Chronicle Datebook*, Rachel Howard – June 10, 2021

“That Goddess Quality? This Ailey Dancer’s Got It... supremely elegant... her facility is as natural as her poise. Regal and soft-spoken, she has delicate, feline bone structure and willowy... She can be soft, she can be unyielding, but her intensity radiates across the stage, pulling your gaze like a magnet... Ms. Green has intensified that pull with a new level of confidence, blossoming in new and classic works.”

“The Passionate Humility of Solomon Dumas... an energy has been radiating from the stage this season, and a spectacular one for Mr. Dumas... showed his range, his unforced strength and his quiet, simmering power. He isn’t flashy; his grounded presence is what makes him so beguiling.”

“...two of the troupe’s most impressive talents, Jacquelin Harris and Chalvar Monteiro...”

“Jeroboam Bozeman, whose broad shoulders and velvety fluidness give him a singular, rugged grace... Mr. Bozeman’s steely performances are more of a slow burn, and that’s even better... At 6-foot-2, Mr. Bozeman has a grounded stage presence that radiates both heat and inner calm.”

“25 to Watch, 2019: the 25 up-and-coming artists we believe are ready to take our field by storm... Emotions flood through Khalia Campbell’s every move... the Bronx native holds nothing back onstage, generously giving her all to the work—not just physically, but spiritually.”
*Dance Magazine*, Charmaine Warren – December 16, 2019

“Ailey’s New Secret Weapon: The Heroically Unmannered James Gilmer...it was clear from the start that he was a standout... A strong partner who, at 6 feet 2, fills the stage with a special kind of grandeur, Gilmer is almost heroically unmannered — his dancing has an ease, a looseness that can be rare in ballet dancers.”

“2022 “25 to Watch”. We’re betting we’ll be seeing—and hearing—more from these 25 artists not just this year, but for many more to come... Ashley Green was a standout dancer—and actor—throughout Whim W’Him’s all-digital 2020–21 season, her first with the company... This unpretentious, passionate dancer has staying power...”
*Dance Magazine* – January 2022 issue

“First-season dancer Ashley Kaylynn Green made a breathtaking company debut at every turn, brimming with feeling. In For Four, a tumbling, troubled New York story, her emotive spasms swiftlyed through punches, seductions, and shimmies...”
*Broadway World*, GK Schatzman – January 30, 2022
Broadcast Highlights
2021-22 Season

**CBS Sunday Morning:** The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater celebrates 60 years of modern dance and creative expression

**ABC – Good Morning America 3rd Hour:** Robert Battle discusses the film “Ailey,” which profiles the legendary choreographer and includes historic performances and interviews

**TED Talk:** “Revelations from a Lifetime in Dance”
Judith Jamison shares divine reflections about her five-decade career and introduces excerpts of Ailey’s classic works Cry and Revelations

**HBO Vice:** How Alvin Ailey Dance Theater is making modern dance “pop” again

**Tamron Hall Show:** Judith Jamison Says New AILEY Documentary Gives “Intimate Look” Into His Life

**CBS 2 NY:** Robert Battle and the history of dance

**CNN:** Alvin Ailey Artistic Director Robert Battle answers the question: What drives you?

**NBC - The Today Show:** See Alvin Ailey dancers perform ‘Revelations’ live

**ABC - Nightline:** The legacy of Alvin Ailey, celebrating the Company’s 60th Anniversary

(Click on images for full video)

Radio Highlights

*NPR’s Here & Now,* “Celebrating ‘Revelations’ In These Times”

*NPR’s Here & Now,* “New Documentary Showcases Life And Work Of Dance Great Alvin Ailey”

*NPR’s All Things Considered,* “Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater brings 2 dances made for the web to the stage”

*NPR’s All Things Considered,* “Ailey Debuts ‘Lazarus’ To Celebrate 60th Anniversary”
‘This Is My Choreography Now’

Robert Battle recalls a decade with the Alvin Ailey group.

By BRIAN SEIBERT

Robert Battle, the artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, sitting in his office at the company’s headquarters recently, pointed to a photo on the wall.

It was a composite image, made 10 years ago, of three faces. At left was Alvin Ailey, who formed his namesake troupe in 1958 and built it into an institution of cultural pride and unparalleled popularity. In the center was Judith Jamison, the company star who succeeded Ailey at the helm after his death in 1989 and led the organization into financial stability. And on the right was Battle, who was never a member of the company but had just taken over as its director.

“Wow, OK, a little pressure,” Battle said, understating how he felt back then.

“I wanted the job, but I had doubts,” he continued. “I had this fear that the audience wouldn’t show up, that people would say, ‘The era is over. But people are still showing up.”

This, too, was an understatement. Even during a pandemic that kept the Aliley company offstage for more than a year, it is financially stable and artistically thriving. On Wednesday, it returns to New York City Center for its annual December season. A week or two shorter than usual (through
This Is
His Ailey
Now

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11
Dec. 10, the run will — apart from a few excerpts at the BAAND Together Dance Festival in August — be the company’s first series of live performances since March 2020.

That’s plenty to celebrate, but the company will also commemorate Barnett’s 10 years in charge with a program devoted solely to his choreography (Tuesday and Dec. 13 and 17). Such a focus on his dances is rare. When he took over as director, Barnett was an independent choreographer with his own company; raising the possibility that his works would come to dominate the Ailey repertory that didn’t happen.

But Battle, 49, has transformed that reality nevertheless. While the Ailey classics and the near-uniqueness of Ailey’s signature masterpiece, “Revelations,” he has brought in works by unexpected choreographers like Paul Taylor, Oladah Akinnibosi and Wayne McGregor. He has commissioned pieces by Kyle Abraham, the hip-hop master Rennie Harris and Ronald K. Brown, who many Ailey watchers had hoped would succeed Jamar.

In 2019, Barnett chose Jamar Roberts, a dancer in the company, as its first resident choreographer, discovering and nurturing one of today’s most acclaimed voices.

With Battle’s encouragement, these and other artists have taken risks both stylistic and thematic — addressing gun violence, the impact of the prison system on Black families, lynching, massacres. There have been few duds and misfires, but the standard — and criticism — of the Jamar Barnett era — that the new repertory didn’t do justice to the always exceptional Ailey dancers — is now seldom heard.

“Ballet has been diligent in expanding the ballet legacy according to its inciting logics,” said Thomas F. DeFrancesco, the author of “Dancing Revelation” and a professor of dance and African American studies at Duke University. “He has balanced the three-part mission surprisingly well, presenting new work by young artists, presenting works by established artists from a broad range of choreographic traditions, and telling stories of Black life in dance.”

And what does Barnett think, 10 years on? “I knew Robert would have a different palate,” she said, “but he understands the traditions of the company, which has always been forward-thinking. He’s been delivering beautifully, which is what I expected.”

The Ailey legacy has also been on Battle’s mind. In his office, next to a desk he inherited from Ailey, holding a talismanic prism that Ailey owned, the man in charge spoke of second-guessing his choices, wondering “Would Ailey have liked this?” He recalled how Jamar told him to trust his own voice, and how the approval of that confidence helped his confidence. Only recently, though, has he been feeling fully comfortable in his position, ready to go, he said.

What Battle appreciates in Harris, he said, “is how hard he works, and how he sees things that I don’t see.” Battle recognized something similar in Roberts’s choreography: “How is he seeing and hearing that? Where is this movement that I don’t recognize coming from?”

“I wanted Jamar to have a place to continue his investigation,” Battle said. “I’ve never asked him to do anything specific. I want to pay it forward because that opportunity was given to me.”

Battle was referring to when he was a member of David Pearson’s company in the 1990s. “I liked making little things,” he said, and Pearson “saw that and put some of it on.”

“Those were works that attracted the attention of people at Ailey, leading to commissions for the company and eventually to the directorship.”

But Battle took over at Ailey, he said, “not program much of his own choreography.” “I wanted to be looked at as a curator,” he said. “And I knew that every step I took was going to be held up against the legacy. I couldn’t create in that.”

In the years since, when friends and fans of his choreography have pressed him to do more of his own work, his response has been that artistic direction is his work. “This is my Ailey legacy,” he tells them.

Apart from “Awakening,” a major premiere for the company in 2013, he has preferred to contribute occasional pieces from his back catalog. “I find a little thing that fits into the repertory, that makes it more personal,” he said.

His new “For Four” — a version of two stage premieres in the City Center season; the other is Roberts’s “Holding Space” — came about “because we needed something for this summer’s virtual gala,” he said. “It tricked me into getting a bit of fun because I didn’t feel the pressure.”

The tumult of the last two years, he said, forced him to see some things differently. He long resisted digital content, but the closing of theaters and the example of his dancers — who, at the start of the lockdown, filmed themselves doing “Revelations” — wherever they were sheltering — taught him that “we could move into the digital space with a purpose other than just doing what the cool kids do.”

At the end of March 2020, the company canceled Ailey All Access virtual programming. “And now millions of people have seen the company that might not have,” he said. “We’ve had to let go of our old thinking.” And after the racial reckoning of 2020, he said he was also reconsidering how Ailey can be part of topical political conversations. “It’s not just about what we do, but because it’s our mission.”

He noted his decision to use the American flag pointedly in his latest dance, “I was a Boy Scout,” he said, “but now a house with the flag has become an oppressive symbol. I needed to show how it’s been co-opted, as if it didn’t belong to me.” Both the allusion and the explanation are unusually explicit for a spokesperson who is typically careful not to offend.

“This is a real generational change,” Battle said. “My great-uncle was born in 1963. If he was talking about a white person, it was in a rush. He was the strongest man I knew, but you didn’t talk about these things. Now the younger generation of dancers are saying that we need to talk about it and show where we stand as an organization.”

“But I think a bridge is being constructed,” he said. “So much of what we do at Ailey has always been about the notion that Black lives matter.”

He cited the new documentary about Ailey by Jamila Wignot as a timely reminder. “You can sort of invent what you might have thought,” Battle said, “but to actually hear him say. Not all my works are political, but I’m a Black man living in this country, I can’t help but be affected. That’s totally current.”

“The knee-jeep thing is to overcome,” he said. “But sometimes you need to double down in your mission. Sometimes you have to think about what doesn’t change, what shouldn’t change.”
Exploring the Dimensions of a New Era

By: Gia Kourlas
December 6, 2021 (online 12/5/21)

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Black lives have always mattered. But these days, the company’s repertoire has more to say about it or perhaps a different way of saying it, with a deeper urgency and radiance — and dancing that seems to be crying for a kind of freedom. “Revelations,” Ailey’s 1960 classic, still does many of the company’s programs, but does it have to? What if, as an experiment, the company started the show with “Revelations”? And what better time than now, when audiences are so grateful for live performance, to shake things up?

The company’s repertory, which has improved during the tenure of the artistic director, Robert Battle, allows for more choices. Ailey didn’t open its season Wednesday at New York City Center with “Lazarus,” by the hip-hop master Beanie Harris, but it should have. The opening was a gala affair on Wednesday, ending with, of course, “Revelations.” The sobering and gorgeous “Lazarus” on Thursday, was even more spellbinding as it explored the systemic oppression of Black people that began centuries ago and continues today.

Has “Lazarus” become more potent and raw? Is it more relevant given the dramatic events that have occurred — the murder of George Floyd and the wave of uprisings in 2020 that demanded an end to police violence against people of color — since its premiere in 2016? Yes and yes and more yes.

Bearing witness to “Lazarus” was more than experiencing another reunion of a dance company that had been put on hold by the pandemic. The company delivered a performance in which dance became something else: a release, somehow both stirring and soothing. The dancers, with their blistering footwork, sliced up the stage. It’s a shame that because of pandemic-related safety issues, this season is shorter than usual: “Lazarus” is scheduled for only one more performance, on Dec. 16.

On Friday night, along with “Revelations” — the crowd roared throughout, even though the performances weren’t as well-continued on page 23.
Exploring the Dimensions of a New Era

A performance that was somewhere both stirring and calming.

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cially the company presented premieres by Battle and his resident choreographer, Januar Roberts. Both pieces were released as digital works during the pandemic; this was their first time onstage with a live audience.

Roberts’s "Holding Space,” named for the empathetic action of being present for another person, also refers to its architecture. The cast members, arranged in rows, perform in solitary squares. When Roberts was choreographing the work, there were safety protocols in place requiring dancers to be six feet away from one another. For the first part of "Holding Space," this is evident. The tense opening movements comprise a web of arms and legs—flinging, reaching, twisting—within invisible walls.

The discordant music, by Tim Hecker, along with Brandon Stirling Baker’s otherworldly lighting—bright white, icy blue and, later, a golden amber—creates a seductive feel as dancers escape their confinement to drift into color. A cube appears: inside, the dancer Jacqueline Green stretches and contorts her long limbs with sculptural ease, as well as what seems to be a yearning to escape. With a flexed foot, she reaches a leg in front of her torso and arches back—almost not only of her balance, but also of her dancing and reaching.

When Green exits the cube, others take her place, last of all Yaezabek Lehme, who pushes against phantasmic forces, torching his torso forward and back and opening his arms like wings. When he comes out of the structure, James Gilmer reaches him on his back and takes over the dance; here, the lighting switches to amber and the music gives way to silence.

For this solo—an addition, and a good one, to the virtual version—Gilmer, showing the flexibility in his strength, allows the movement to soften as it flows through his bones. His change of shirt indicates a transformation as well. Before, the dancers’ tops framed a structured edge between the shoulder and the above. Now they’re soft, and the dancing follows suit—no longer hard and angular; the choreography flows along now as a vehicle for tenderness and healing.

Certainly, in look and in choreography, Roberts, also credited with scenic and costume design, has created something stylish. But is it lasting? "Holding Space" ends up in the category of a pandemic dance—not only for its spatial arrangement, but for its themes of isolation, confinement and, ultimately, transformation. While it has beautiful moments—Gilmer’s solo, especially—it feels anchored to a period of time and its constrictions without being particularly revelatory as a work of art. Battle’s "For Four," a noisy seven or so minutes set to music by Wynton Marsalis, is more surprising. It’s light and buoyant—or so it seems.

But the dancers—Ronald Maurice, Solomon Dumas, Reena Indira Pereyra and Samantha Figgins—but the musical notes with their bodies. They hit hard. Their wild energy, flowing at first, becomes frenetic, almost manic over time; are they having fun or are they desperate? Despite the dancers’ showy smiles, sequined overalls and clapping hands, "For Four" has something sinister simmering beneath its surface.

It’s a trap to make it to the finish line. Dumas is electrifying, feverish, while Figgins is a vision of lattice. Pereyra’s perpetual swirl of motion is only boosted by her whipping, beautiful hair—never has her choreography been so delightful. When suddenly, an American flag is projected onto the back of the stage, Maurice, shrunken, collapses to the floor, the projection slides to the floor, too, where bits of red seem to spread over his skin like blood.

When the final notes play and the dancers stand calmly at the back of the stage, each with a raised fist salute, Maurice rolls on the floor in the shape of an opened fan—or a needle spinning on a record. "For Four" isn’t just about the need to dance amidst a pandemic; it’s a triumphant fight for freedom of body and mind.

Top, Ronald Maurice in Ronnie Harris’s "Lazaurus," which had a renewed power on Thursday. Above, from left, Solomon Dumas, Samantha Figgins, Reena Indira Pereyra and Maurice in Robert Battle’s "For Four."
Ailey’s New Secret Weapon: The Heroically Unmannered James Gilmer

By: Gia Kourlas

December 13, 2021

Bringing His Own Drama Onstage

Alvin Ailey’s new secret weapon is the heroically unmanned James Gilmer.

By GIA KOURLAS

December is not a breeze for an Alvin Ailey dancer, but recently — amid rehearsals and with a performance looming that evening — James Gilmer found himself in an empty closet on the studio side of New York City Center. Armed with a late lunch, he was using his only break of the day for an interview. But as he sees it, it’s better not to waste time.

Cautious is not just looming. It’s here. Even Gilmer’s plans to attend a dance performance just after Thanksgiving were thwarted. Compactions canceled the second half of its season at the Joyce Theater after breakthrough cases of Covid-19 were detected among the dancers. So when it comes to his position at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Gilmer has perspective.

“I’m continuing to be very cautious, and I’m not letting any day pass without remembering that it’s such a gift,” he said. “As much as it’s an opportunity and a privilege to perform onstage daily, it’s even more so now.”

Gilmer, 28, a member of Ailey since June 2019, has reason to feel both grateful and a little hesitant. After he joined the company — it took him two auditions — he moved to Harlem from San Francisco, where he had been performing with ODC/Dance and Amy Seiwert’s Imagery. He excited into “Revelations” after learning the Ailey masterwork from the veteran dancer and associate artistic director, Matthew Rushing.

(“An incredibly dear experience,” Gilmer continued on Page C5.)

James Gilmer, at the Ailey studios on West 50th Street, is “really humble in all sense of the word,” a colleague says.
Bringing His Own Drama Onstage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

saw. He went on an international tour with the company, and finished his first season at City Center. But then the pandemic hit. What do you do if you love your job and then have to go into lockdown? Gilmer still might have been gathering his strength, but it was clear from the start that he was a stand-out.

Still at home, unable to perform, he did a lot of yoga, which he had become devoted to while living in California. "It feels like my body was my own," he said. "I really needed to center using that practice."

But Gilmer’s first serious dance language was ballet. Somewhat unusually for an Ailey dancer, he had an unexpected career before he arrived at the company. Classically trained from an early age — he studied in his hometown, at Pittsburgh Ballet Theater School — Gilmer spent six seasons with Cincinnati Ballet, where he amazed the rank of soloists.

A strong partner who, at 6 feet 2, fills the stage with a special kind of grandeur, Gilmer is almost originally unassuming — his dancing has an ease, a homesickness that can be rare in ballet dancers. Robert Battle, Ailey’s artistic director, recalled being struck by his size and agility, along with his versatility.

"I remember asking a friend of mine in California, ‘What’s he like?’ And it was, ‘Oh, he's no drama, he's easygoing, but really gifted.'"

Battle admires Gilmer’s noble bearing and what he calls "a genuine heart." "He’s really nimble in all senses of the word," he added, "which is usually just meaning flexible. But I mean something a little more soulful: He’s not a peacock, you know? He’s very much about the work and about giving himself over to the work in such a wonderful and beautiful way." Gilmer could be a peacock: With his elegant carriage and line, and his scrupulous technique, he could veer toward a more aloof place as a performer — or be a show-off. "He has a wonderful economy with how he shows his colors — his feathers if you will," Battle said. "He’s able to meet the challenges of the different choreographers that come in because he's so open."

Battle staged when coaching him in Arizona, Battle laughed. "His whole body is an instrument," Battle said. "You get up, immediately responsive, to what it is you’re asking him to do. And that may seem simple, but believe me, it isn’t."

Gilmer first saw the Ailey company perform when he was around 9 or 10. He was always a fan. "Even when I started focusing on ballet, there was a part of me that always wanted Ailey and always kind of dreamed of Ailey," he said.

For Gilmer, being an Ailey dancer has to do with being able to improvise a story, something he said he has wanted to do onstage his whole life. Finding the drama — and his own personal drama — within a classic Ailey role is not the same thing as being a prince in ballet.

While in Cincinnati, Gilmer performed in works by George Balanchine and contemporary choreographers, as well as dancing leading classical parts in "Cinderella," "The Nutcracker" and "Romeo and Juliet." (He played Tybalt, "Dying Simplicity," he said, flashing a quick grin. "So fun!")

When he left to dance in California, he hadn’t planned on abandoning ballet entirely. But he wanted to transition out of a company that was so focused on full-length story ballets. "With their usual narratives and characterizations, although fun to perform," he said, "I was left feeling unused and somewhat unexpressed as a person and artist."

Gilmer wanted more than "lights-and-a-tum-tum" roles; he said, "I could also feel myself being pulled to find a place where there were more bodies like mine, not just Black but long limbed, athletic, versatile dancer bodies."

He loved working for Victoria Morgan, Cincinnati Ballet’s artistic director, calling her "a visionary type of a boss."

He loves working with women in general, he said, including Twyla Tharp, who cast him in the premiere of "Second Dust" opposite Jacqueline Harris, also of Ailey, for her "Pedro" program at City Center. During the working process — it was extensive — Tharp told him to train like a bear.

What did that mean? "I was told," he said. "Having a sense of lightness on the floor. It’s being able to move in any direction and how that correlates to your core and where things are releasing and also inhaling your body onstage. Being able to just be in your bones and muscles. And that’s the performance."

That is why his feet were especially late and lively in "Honeymoon," a hip-hop work by Ronnie Harris, this season! It is a grounded, so relaxed, despite, at times, the choreography’s breakneck speed. Yet Gilmer’s performance, particularly in the dancer’s more dramatic moments, isn’t expected, but intimate, private, reserved, haunting.

That may have had something to do with Tharp, too, who coached him in both his dancing and his acting: "To learn from someone of that caliber after so much time away from dance was really satisfying that huge void and the urgency to recreate and sort of get moving again," Gilmer said. "I’ve been able to really take that and run with it with everything. There are obviously certain ways of training, but there’s so much that she made me realize that I can take into any dancing space and really transform the way that I perform."

He laughed. "She’s so cool," he said. "I hope that that won’t be (it likely won't be) at the very least, Battle plans on bringing "Second Dust" into the Ailey repertoire."

In thinking about why dance became such an important part of his life — Gilmer said his parents signed him up for classes because he was always moving — he considers his upper-middle-class upbringing and how much privilege goes into becoming a professional dancer: "When you have two parents as a Black person, and you’re able to grow up in a Victorian-style home with your own bedroom and a living room and a second floor and a third floor and having the availability to move around," he said. "Like physically move my body through space and run up and down stairs. And the yard having a front yard, having a backyard."

He grew up, essentially, in a world of space, and that gave him a restless spirit: "I feel something within me," he said. "It always drew me back to the studio." As a dancer, Gilmer wants to share it, to be like the women he’s worked with, genuine and passionate. "It also almost elevates the responsibility because I’ve been given so incredibly much," he said. "So to give it back to the audience in that way really is what I ever intend to do."
With each glistening drop of sweat, your body is benefiting both inside and out, with stronger immunity, greater endurance, and smoother skin. The latest science explains why you want to steam things up.

by Tula Karras
Our bodies are always sweating a bit, whether we sense it or not, partly to keep our skin hydrated.

MEET THE AMAZING DANCERS IN MOTION

The grace and grit you see on these pages owes to the artistry of four stars of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (opening image, from left): Khalia Campbell, Constance Stanislaus, Solomon Dumas, and James Gilmer. December marks the storied company’s return to live performances in its home theater in New York, with a national tour to over 20 cities kicking off on January 25. For the latest news and how to see these dancers in performance, follow @alvinailey or visit alvinailey.org.
People who are fitter actually sweat more. That means they can often exercise longer and more comfortably.
Leaps & Bounds

After a year of solo practices and virtual performances, dancers are back on stage doing what they do best: performing in front of live audiences. But for some of the field’s biggest, most transformative stars, choreographing the future of an art form steeped in tradition means leaving some things in the past.

Photographs by AMY TROOST
Styling by SAMIRA NASR
Watch Harper’s BAZAAR ‘Let’s Dance’ online video featuring Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s Courtney Celeste Spears here.
Now They Can Focus On the Choreography

By BRIAN SEIBERT

When star dancers retire, it's always a little sad. And if those dancers are still in their prime, fans can feel an especially acute sense of loss. The performances that won't happen are easy to imagine.

But in the uncommon case when the dancer has already achieved distinction as a choreographer and is retiring to focus on that craft, the loss is offset by potential gain. The dancer will be absent from the stage, but the dancer's spirit and sensibility might spread across it.

This fall, the uncommon is happening twice. On Oct. 9, Lauren Lovette is retiring from New York City Ballet. On Dec. 9, Jamar Roberts is giving his farewell performance with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Both are beloved dancers, unsentimental standouts in companies that are constellations of stars. Both are choreographers whose artistic voices have already made a difference.

Lovette has been a radiant presence at City Ballet from the moment she joined the corps in 2010. Within a few months, she was already attracting attention in principal roles. Beneath a sweetness and sparkle, you could sense a shading and inner life that might mature with time. That's what happened.

And in 2017, a year after she had been promoted to principal, she revealed other partially hidden gifts: those of a dance maker. As a student, she had shown choreographic talent, but while concentrating on performing, she had left that skill undeveloped. Now, it has blossomed.

The three works she has made for City Ballet have increased in ambition and assurance. Like her onstage persona, they have more depth and nuance than the surface might lead you to assume. In particular, her disregard of gender norms — men partnering men, women partnering women — has the beautiful matter-of-factness of a fait accompli.

But breaking with convention still takes bravery, as it does for Lovette, 28, to break out on her own. Her spirit is already spreading. American Ballet Theater performed her “La Follia Variations” on its 2021 cross-country summer tour and has programmed that work for its fall season in New York.

Roberts's choreographic gift was hidden for longer. He joined the Ailey company in 2002. That he left twice — and returned — suggests a restlessness, though what he showed onstage was mainly the quiet strength of a large, graceful man and a subtle interpretive intelligence.

The first work he made for the Ailey company, in 2017, came as a surprise. Here were signs of daring and a rare ability to approach complex, powerful emotions not directly (a recipe for corniness) but through an idiosyncratic rhythmic and physical sensibility.

After he became the Ailey troupe's first resident choreographer, in 2019, those signs became unmistakable. And, amazingly, during the pandemic, his artistic stature has continued to grow. “Cooped,” a short film he made on his iPad early in the pandemic, and a later film, “Colored Me,” should endure as two of the most potent dance works of the period.

The solo Roberts made for himself for the 2020 Fall for Dance festival can serve as a reminder of what we’ll be missing when he stops dancing. But the Ailey season in which he’s retiring as a performer also includes his new group piece “Holding Space,” and it’s a winner. His spirit is spreading into Lovette's territory, too: His first work for City Ballet debuts in February.
Film looks at what made Mr. Ailey Mr. Ailey

By: Linda Matchan

July 25, 2021

The documentary “Ailey”—opening nationwide in theaters Aug. 6, is a love-odyssey portrait of the modern dance pioneer.

Alvin Ailey was born in 1931 and died in 1989 at age 58. But, significantly, much of the biopic film documentary was filmed in 2018 at a New York dance studio near a street named Alvin Ailey Place. As we watch a new generation of dancers taking direction from hip-hop/chorégraphie Remie Harris, it’s as though Ailey never really left, and his company has always evolved to meet the times.

At the time, Harris had been commissioned “out of the blue” by Robert Battle, artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, to create a work about Ailey for the 60th anniversary of the company, founded in 1958. These in Harris, focusing in a screening room, watching and re-watching archival footage of Ailey, as he worked to create what would become “Lazarus.”

“I just sit there and watch,” Harris says, “to find out what made Mr. Ailey Mr. Ailey.”

What did make Mr. Ailey Mr. Ailey? The director Jamil Wigner grapples with this question, too, in this compelling film about the legendary dancer, director and choreographer — the one who brought black culture into the dance mainstream. The documentary premiered in January at the Sundance Film Festival.

Given Ailey’s stature and enduring impact, and given that he died more than 30 years ago, it’s a wonder that the question is still being asked. The Ailey company has performed on six continents for millions of people.

Ailey’s masterful 1960 ballet “Revelations,” which draws on the sorrow and jubilation of African American spirituals, gospel and blues from the “blood moons” of his Texas childhood, is a revered cultural treasure. It’s been said to be the most widely seen modern dance work in the world.

“We want to let us off the stage,” former Ailey dancer Ronee Blakely told the film, describing a performance in Europe. “It was about 60-some hours that we had to do, I’ve never seen anyone stand up and take their shoes off.”

But Ailey’s artistic legacy is more than the sum of the stories he created, soaring though they are. It derived from his early years during the Depression, growing up Black in small-town Texas without a father, picking cotton with his mother when he was just 4 years old, sometimes going hungry.

“I mean, if you were Black, you were nothing,” Ailey says in a segment of a newly filmed audio interview with journalist Peter Tatchell. Ailer’s body was recorded over 20 hours after the choreographer died. “I remember seeing my mother on her knees scrubbing those white folks’ rooms and stools.”

Listening to his recollections, paired with moody and evocative archival footage of the Deep South, it’s clear that Ailey was destined to dance. It’s as though dance was in his DNA. When he describes his rural childhood, it’s in terms of movement and the placement of bodies in space. He speaks of “people moving in theRead more ->
Jamila Wignot’s documentary explores the life of Alvin Ailey.

Too often, the idea of Alvin Ailey is reduced to a single dance: “Revelations.” His 1960 exploration of the Black experience remains a masterpiece, but it also overshadows the person who made it. How can an artist grow after such early success? Who was Alvin Ailey the man?

In “Ailey,” the director Jamila Wignot layers images, video and — most important — voice-overs from Ailey to create a portrait that feels as poetic and nuanced as choreography itself. Black-and-white footage of crowds filing into church, children playing, dance parties, and the dusty landscape of Texas (his birthplace) builds an atmosphere. Like Ailey’s dances, the documentary leaves you swimming in sensation.

Ailey’s story is told alongside the creation of “Lazarus,” a new dance by the contemporary choreographer Rennie Harris, whose homage to Ailey proposes an intriguing juxtaposition of past and present. In his search to reveal the man behind the legacy, Harris lands on the theme of resurrection. Ailey died in 1989, but his spirit lives on in his dancers.

But his early days weren’t easy. Born in 1931, Ailey never knew his father and recalls “being glued to my mother’s hip. Slouching through the terrain. Branches slashing against a child’s body. Going from one place to another. Looking for a place to be. My mother off working in the fields, I used to pick cotton.”

He was only 4. Ailey spoke about how his dances were full of “dark deep things, beautiful things inside me that I’ve always been trying to get out.”

All the while, Ailey, who was gay, remained intensely private. Here, we grasp his anguish, especially after the sudden death of his friend, the choreographer and dancer Joyce Trisler. In her honor, he choreographed “Memoria” (1971), a dance of loneliness and celebration. “I couldn’t cry until I saw this piece,” he says.

Ailey’s mental health was fragile toward the end of his life; Wignot shows crowds converging on sidewalks, but instead of having them walk normally, she reverses their steps. He was suffering from AIDS. Before his death, he passed on his company to Judith Jamison, who sums up his magnetic, enduring presence: “Alvin breathed in and never breathed out.”

Again, it’s that idea of resurrection. “We are his breath out,” she continues. “So that’s what we’re floating on, that’s what we’re living on.”
Anyone who has studied theater and dance will know the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and its founder. Not only did Ailey form a dance movement, but his company also became a pioneering force for Black artists as they traveled the world, introducing political themes and helping integrate the world of dance.

Street dancer-turned-choreographer Rennie Harris had heard the name but didn’t become interested in the Ailey movement until late in the 1990s. “I was a hardcore dancer. At that point, I wasn’t feeling modern dance,” Harris explains.

Now the two are linked through the doc “Ailey,” which will be released nationwide Aug. 6. The film highlights the legendary choreographer’s life and visionary work, with Harris interpreting his dances.

It was when Harris finally saw the trailblazing “Revelations,” the 1960s work that put Ailey on the map, that he became inspired. Later, he was hired by the Alvin Ailey company to re-create the choreographer’s works. In the doc, we see Harris workshopping “Lazarus,” a production about racial injustice in Jim Crow-era Texas. Director Jamila Wignot mixes archival Ailey footage and interviews as Harris puts his production together in the studio.

By watching the archival clips alongside Harris’ re-creation, “Alvin Ailey shifts from God of African American culture and dance to having this human element,” Harris says.

The documentary also brings to light the revolutionary idea at the time of “Black bodies doing ballet,” Harris says. “Alvin had a lot to say politically with dance. They wanted him to get out and protest, but I don’t think people got that the company itself — the Alvin Ailey dance company — was a protest.”
“He’s just as important as Michael Jordan,” said Tremaine Emory.

Emory was referring to Alvin Ailey, the Black activist and choreographer who founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1958, when Black stories weren’t being told onstage through modern dance. His name isn’t as familiar as Michael Jordan’s, but his impact is far reaching.

Ailey passed more than three decades ago, but his name still lives on through the dance company that he founded and the work he contributed. In 1960 he produced “Revelations,” a piece that tells the story of African American culture from slavery to freedom, and is still being performed by his company today.

Emory, the designer behind Denim Tears, wanted to honor that with his newest project, an apparel collection called Cry/Revelations that was produced by Champion. Emory said Champion approached him about a collaboration and he immediately knew he wanted to do something connected to Alvin Ailey.

“Dance in general is one of the highest forms of art and sports,” said Emory. “Champion is associated with all of these sports that are typically hetero and machismo sports. And I wanted to show that women, men, every part of the spectrum, the LGBTQ community, and intersexual as well are the highest level of athletes, too, the highest level of artists, too, and the highest level of creatives as well.”

Robert Battle, the Artistic Director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, says this type of partnership is the first of its kind for the group, but he was open to it because of the synergies between the stories Ailey told through dance and the stories Emory tells through his brand Denim Tears, which is best known for its denim covered in cotton wreaths that symbolize the legacy of slavery in the US.

“When I learned about Tremaine and how his work leans into that space of social justice, I thought, ‘Wow. What a symbiotic opportunity,’” said Battle. “People don’t often think of fashion as having had a history of political and social statements, and they don’t often think of dance as having that same history. So it was an opportunity to educate people, but also to put Alvin Ailey in that space of fashion and represent his influence on fashion.”

Emory said there wasn’t an Alvin Ailey apparel archive to reference, so he looked at photographs and rare books he found at Lee Kaplan’s Arcana bookstore in Los Angeles, including a book of photographs of Alvin Ailey dancers taken by Jack Mitchell in 1993. The line includes satin coach jackets featuring the American and Pan African flag, crochet tops, sweatsuits covered with photographs of Alvin Ailey dancers, trench coats influenced by Alvin Ailey’s Hobo Sapiens piece, and lots of madras. Emory said in his research he found that the madras print was an Indian fabric appropriated by European and then Western culture and he wanted to bring it back to Black and brown people.
Emory promoted the line with a short film directed by Taylour Paige and styled by Hanna Yohannz featuring Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s Samantha Figgins and Yannick Lebrun dancing throughout the Queens Museum. Battle said it was important to tie the clothing back to dance and show that it is a live expression and not just an artifact hanging on a wall.

Over the past couple of years, Alvin Ailey’s name has had a resurgence. A documentary directed by Jamila Wignot on Ailey’s life titled “Ailey,” was released earlier this year and is now available to rent on iTunes, and Barry Jenkins is set to direct an Alvin Ailey biopic. Battle, who says there is also an extensive exhibit in the works, is ensuring that Alvin Ailey’s legacy remains relevant to a younger generation.

“We have this whole generation of folks who didn’t grow up going to see performances in the theater, let alone seeing dance, so how could we humanize Alvin Ailey, the man, in a way that lives on people’s apparel. Because it will make people ask questions,” says Battle. “So that was really important to me that we struck a chord with the younger generation that are fashion forward.”

Emory, who signed a two-year partnership with Levi’s earlier this year, wants to continue to use his line as a way to tell stories about the Black experience.

“With Spike Lee’s Forty Acres and a Mule he told stories, he made clothing, he published books, he made documentaries, and he still does. So with Denim Tears I always see it as a mix of Forty Acres and a Mule, Willi Smith, Cross Colours, FUBU, and the sportswear brands I grew up on like Stüssy, Supreme, SIR, Union New York, and Ralph Lauren,” says Emory. “So I will continue to reference those brands and tell stories that are African diaspora centric.”
Few dance companies are more prestigious and competitive to get into than Manhattan-based Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. So, despite years of training and confidence in the skills she’d honed, Bronx native Khalia Campbell was stunned when she was asked to join in 2018. “I cried and cried,” she says. “I was totally in shock, but I was elated and I was grateful. I think that’s the best word to describe the feeling I had — grateful. One could say that it was destined to be.” “I don’t come from a musical background, but my dad was pretty musically inclined,” Campbell says of her father, who died when she was 1. “He was a DJ and he also played the drums. He used to put his headsets around my mom’s stomach when she was pregnant with me, so I just came out being able to listen to rhythm and move to it.”

Moving to the extent that that she does — learning choreography, practicing multiple types of dance, performing onstage, and living in NYC, where walking is as fundamental as breathing — means that to Campbell, wellness isn’t a modern, faddish luxury to indulge in; it’s an essential part of her life. “To me, wellness is the quality of your health in all aspects — mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually,” she says. “And I’m big on the spiritual. I’m a believer in God.”

Ahead, Campbell shares how she takes care of her mind and body, including the vitamins she swears by, the morning routine that grounds her, and her favorite skin-care products.

On how she got into dance: I started dancing when I was about three years old, in the church. Then, when I was four, I started tap dance at the Ruth Williams studio in Harlem. As children do, I got bored and stopped for a while. But at nine, I picked tap back up and started doing ballet, African dance, gymnastics, hip-hop, everything. That’s when I really got serious, and I just knew that this was what I wanted to do. This was all at Uptown Dance Academy, and then I went to LaGuardia for high school, which is known as the Fame school. I got waitlisted at [some schools I applied to] and didn’t go to college. I started my first professional job when I was 18 in Aida, the musical, which was in Taiwan.

On how the COVID pandemic changed her approach to wellness: COVID made me more aware of how, mentally, I needed to do some self work. I realized that the way I was thinking about myself wasn’t healthy, and I needed to discover my self worth. I didn’t have dance anymore, and dance was my identity for so long. I had to figure out, Who is Khalia, the woman? Who is Khalia without dance? So there was a lot of mental and spiritual work that I had to embark on, because what I had to cover everything up — dance, being around family and friends, other distractions — I didn’t have any more. I was forced to deal with my unhealthy habits physically, too, like what I was eating. I had to ask, What am I doing to make sure that I’m as healthy as I can be? The pandemic made me much more aware of how I was treating myself.

On how she starts her morning: The timing of when I wake up ranges. I’m trying to be more intentional and disciplined and consistent when it comes to my routine, but on a regular work day, I normally wake up around 7:30 or 8 a.m. The first thing I do is my quiet time, which is talking to God. I journal, and then I open up my Bible and pray. I shower, and choose my outfit based on what dance we’re doing that day; sometimes it’s balletic, sometimes it’s something more urban. Afterward, I eat breakfast at home or get it on the way to the company. Breakfast is typically a smoothie. I love smoothies from Juice Generation — I usually get the strawberry-mango-pineapple and add ginger.

On her diet: During the pandemic I started eating meat again, which is crazy because I was pescatarian for two years. It was basically like emotional eating. I’ve gone back to not eating any chicken or beef or pork; I stick to salmon and sea bass fish. And I can’t eat too much dairy because it creates a lot of mucus in my system, and my joints get very inflamed. I take vitamins, and during the pandemic I’ve been really serious about it. I’m big on vitamin C and zinc, and my mom just put me onto sea moss. It comes in vitamin form, and has all these sea nutrients that are good for your body. My two biggest
indulgences are chips and gelato. Like I said, I typically don’t do dairy, but oh my goodness — Talenti Cookie Caramel Swirl — I could eat a whole pint in one sitting.

On how she moves: Working with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, it’s not enough to just take class. I learned this the hard way. [Laughs.] Because of the strenuous work and wide range of dance styles that we do, cross-training is a big part of the company culture. At one point I was really into Pilates and yoga. I don’t do it anymore because my training has changed, but I’ll go on YouTubes and find exercise routines to help strengthen my core, and do those. We have an amazing physical therapy team and they give us exercises to do as well, personalized for our bodies and anything we may be struggling with.

On preventing injury: The toll that dance takes on you is high if you don’t take care of your body. I have colleagues who have never had an injury in their life, and it’s because they take care of their bodies. That consists of daily visits to the physical therapist to make sure that your body is aligned, cross-training, massages, and eating foods that give you energy. We dance so much that sometimes you just want to relax and not do anything, but your body is your instrument and you have to take care of it — you only have one. And everybody is different, you know? Being aware of what your body needs and likes is important. Write it down, talk about it with a doctor; I know some dancers who do allergy tests. These are all things that help you perform to the best of your ability.

On her nighttime routine: To be honest, I don’t have one. What I typically do to wind down is just sit on the couch and watch Netflix on my laptop. [My bedtime] has been getting later and later. Right now it’s around 11, which isn’t the best. Again, I’m working on intentionality and discipline. [Laughs.]

On her favorite wellness practices: I would love to incorporate more massages into my routine — maybe once a week. Also, getting your nails and feet done is considered wellness, right? [Laughs.] I love manicures and pedicures.

On skincare: I love Origins. I use A Perfect World™ SPF 40 to moisturize my face during the day; it has white tea. At nighttime, I use the high-potency cream. I also have the daily face wash, the exfoliator, and a mask that I use once or twice a week. I’m so big on skin care. For toner, I typically use witch hazel in the morning and rose water at night. I like natural products.
What My Teacher Taught Me: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s Solomon Dumas on Lisa Johnson-Willingham

By: Solomon Dumas, as told to Haley Hilton
August 17, 2021

When I was in high school, my friends at The Chicago Academy for the Arts told me about Lisa Johnson-Willingham, an impressive former Ailey dancer who was teaching Horton at Joel Hall Dancers & Center on Thursday nights. I decided I ought to give her class a try.

The first time I went, I didn’t even pay for class. In fact, I don’t think I ever paid for her class. She was tough as nails, but she was always generous. The room was packed with people from all over the city. From modern dancers to professional ballet dancers to young students—everyone wanted to learn from her. Her classroom got so hot from sweaty bodies that the windows completely fogged up and contrasted the cold night outside.

In the beginning of our relationship, I was so nervous, intimidated and shy around Lisa. At the end of that first class she said, “OK, Boo! You need to point those feet and straighten those knees though.” She was always going to be honest with me. She is a very small woman who is full of knowledge and completely sure of herself. I remember she once told us, “I just had a baby and I’m doing this full-out—what’s going on with you guys?”

She was critical, but I never left feeling beaten down because she used humor to help us learn. She was a clown—a comedian who told us what we needed to improve while simultaneously making us laugh. She corrects everyone, including her assistants at the front of the room, so her students never felt that a correction was a bad thing, but something we all needed to grow. She is great at identifying every single person in the room and speaking to them in a way that they will understand. Whether it’s someone who doesn’t speak English, a child from the inner city or a bunhead of 12 years, she adapts her teaching to their needs.

At 17, I landed a musical that she was assistant-directing. She was 40 years old and six months pregnant and dancing full-out—we’re talking grands jetés! I was the youngest person in the cast, and she had my back. She would pull me off to the side and give me pointers whenever I needed help. Then, the summer after I graduated from high school, she hired me as a group leader for AileyCamp. She kind of forced me into it. She’d say, “OK, Solomon, I need you to sub for this class,” or “I need you to take over this class,” or “I need you to choreograph something for me.” She never asked if I was ready. She didn’t give me time to second-guess myself—she just trusted me with opportunities, and she’s the reason I teach today.

At each camp, she knew every child’s first and last name, and expected everyone else to as well. She often included children from foster care, and made sure everyone was treated equally, no matter their background. When I first started as a group leader, I was working with adolescents who were going through a lot. I told Lisa about one child in particular who I felt was a problem. She responded by saying, “No, they aren’t the problem, you are the problem.” I was so surprised—I thought the child needed to be reprimanded. Instead, she made the child her assistant for the rest of the camp. She got through to them by keeping them busy and giving them responsibility.

She used that same teaching tool with me and my career. After high school, I went to college at New World School of The Arts for two years, but had to drop out for financial reasons. I came home feeling like my life was completely off track. She found out what happened and called me up. She got me back in her class, and for the next six months, she nursed me back to health as her assistant. Then, when she thought I was ready, she told me it was time to get out of Chicago. She wanted me to audition for Ailey. After attending the summer program, dancing with Ailey II, and four years of dancing outside of the institution, I eventually landed a spot in the first company—an opportunity that never would have been possible without her pushing me.

Lisa always encouraged me to amplify the groundedness in my dancing. When I was a young student in her class, she told me not to change my dancing to match anyone else’s, even if the other men in the companies I aspired to were bunheads. She said, “One day, it will be something that will be celebrated.” She was right. I am not the man with crazy legs. I don’t do all the tricks. But I am passionate, and that is celebrated at Ailey. I have been given opportunities I never even dreamed I would get, and that is, in part, because of Lisa.

Today, Lisa and I both work at Ailey: I as a dancer and she as the director of Ailey Extension. She has had so many different titles within the organization: a dancer, a choreographer, the director of the arts and education summer intensives. She is able to do anything you throw in front of her. She is a mover, a shaker, a visionary. She is all the superlatives you can think of. She is Wonder Woman.
Amazing Grace — Still, We Dance: An Ode to the Deliverance and Joy of Self-Expression

By: Kibwe Chase-Marshall
September 2020 Issue
"DANCERS DON'T DO THIS BECAUSE IT'S THEIR JOB. THEY DO IT BECAUSE IT'S THEIR PASSION. IT'S THEIR ESSENCE." — GARTH FARMER

...
Realigning for a Eurythmic Convergence

By: Gia Kourlas
March 21, 2020

Set adrift and apart, dancers from Alvin Ailey's group film, then merge, pieces of a whole.

By GIA KOURLAS

As the lyrics go in "I Been 'Buked" — the opening section of Alvin Ailey's masterpiece, "Revelations" — "There is trouble all over this world."

Don't we know it. Last week after Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater abruptly ended its tour and sent its dancers home, Danica Paulos — who creates content on Instagram for the group — asked her fellow company members if they were, she said, "down to create some positivity and some inspiration."

The idea came from the dancer Miranda Quinn: The opening sequence of "The Brady Bunch" popped into her head. "How they're all in little squares," she said. "That made me think of how we're all being quarantined and are supposed to stay separate, but this was a way for all of us to still be dancing together and creating together even though we're apart."

Ten dancers, including three who are retiring this year — Ms. Paulos, Akua Noni Parker and Hope Boykin — grace the resulting video, in which they are shown in their own environments performing "Buked." Ms. Quinn described it as "very vulnerable and about creating and nurturing hope through community," adding that she thought it "was perfect for what's happening now."

The dancers are shown in squares performing the deep plies and overhead reaches of the choreography with each adding to the last like an undulating prayer, until they all appear octogenarian, lowering their arms with their palms facing forward. As the clips accumulate, we see family members, dogs and children.

The result is an artifact, elegant in its brevity: a work of art repurposed from another work of art that speaks to the moment and shows dancers performing, yes, but also just being themselves in their private spaces.

Ms. Paulos plans on creating more videos every week with different dancers, whom she will cast herself. Next up, a part of Ben nie Harris's "Lazarus," after a gunshot when, she said, "all of the men are dancing and some women come in and it's two minutes of great dance."

She would also like to showcase Ailey's "Cry." And the dancer Patrick Cooper suggested "Sinner Man" from "Revelations." But with its virtuosic jumps and spin, it requires space — a studio apartment would never cut it. In a text, he wrote to Ms. Paulos: "If anyone wants to do Sinner Man, I'll be down to meet in a park."

"I was like, 'Awesome,'" she said. "That would be beautiful."
Robert Battle Likes to Cook, and Connect

By: Kathryn Shattuck
August 9, 2020

“I always say that pessimism and anger is a place that I visit, but my permanent address is optimism and hope,” said Robert Battle, the artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Since the pandemic lockdown in March, Battle has been consumed with keeping the company in shape. Until Wednesday, a collaboration among Battle, his predecessor, Judith Jamison, and the choreographer Rennie Harris will stream on Ailey All Access. Battle has recently been considering the organization’s role in the Black Lives Matter movement. “I’ve been thinking a lot about the notion of, before it was a hashtag or a movement, that the company was demonstrating that Black lives matter in all of the work that we do,” he said. “But it’s not enough to live it. You have to say it expressly, that this is what we do and we are in solidarity. It’s not that we need to reinvent the wheel, but we need to roll it.” These days Battle hunkers down in Connecticut, tending his vegetable garden alongside his dog, North. He elaborated on the 10 things that have kept his mood aloft. These are edited excerpts from the conversation.

1. Sarah Vaughan’s “Sassy Swings
   The Tivoli” (1963)

My mother and a friend of hers, they would listen to Billy Eckstine and Ella Fitzgerald, but mostly Sarah Vaughan. When I was a kid, they would sit on the front porch, have a glass of wine, and that was their way of winding down. My mom’s friend bought me a cassette tape of her singing, and I played it until it fell apart. That passion for Sarah Vaughan has never left me.

2. His Piano

My mother played piano for the church that I grew up going to, and there was a Kimball piano at home. They discovered that I had an ear for music and so they got me piano lessons. I studied until I got involved in dance, at about 11 or 12, and then it kind of disappeared on me. But I’ve always needed to have a piano around, even if I just play the same songs that I already know.

3. Cherished Family Photos

My grandfather raised me since I was 3 weeks old, and I think that’s where my sense of strength and duty and perseverance comes from. He only made it to the third grade because his parents died and he had to raise his siblings. My mother inspired me because of her artistic inclinations. She nurtured that performer in me. And although I was being bullied in my neighborhood, Liberty City (in Miami), I had a whole different narrative at home — that being an artist was almost kind of normal. And of course Alvin Ailey, so that I’m always reminded of the shoulders on which I stand.

4. Tabitha Brown’s Videos

Tabitha Brown I found because she was going on this journey of becoming a vegan. Coming from where I come from, I didn’t know a lot of African-American people that were vegetarians or vegan. Sometimes the way she talks about it, I’m that close to trying. And then the most part of me gets the best of me. Because I love ribs and steak and it’s just — I’m sorry, I can’t.

5. Maya Angelou

I hardly get through a speech or an interview without saying some quote that I’ve gotten from Maya Angelou. Her life, you know from “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,” it’s really a life well lived. And she wasn’t afraid to express those things that were difficult for her. So I connected with the poetry. She did, for me, act as a kind of guide without her even knowing it.

6. Trying New Recipes

Cooking is like taking a dance, except nobody complains when you say, “Slam yourself to the floor.” The notion of starting with these few ingredients, or sometimes a lot of ingredients, and slowly developing the flavor — that’s just something about the practice that really excites me, and relaxes me and gives me some sense of control. I can’t change the pandemic, but I can certainly make a mean brisket with a little BBQ sauce.

7. Dancers Connecting

When this whole thing went down and we came off the road, Miranda Quin, who was a new dancer, had the idea of doing a “Brady Bunch” version of the first part of “Revelations.” The dancers in their different homes — you could see the dogs running past — they made it very real. And it caught fire on social media, which led us codifying it into something called Ailey All Access. They also did Dancer Diaries, where dancers would talk about how they were feeling in this moment, and physicalize it and verbalize it in a way that was really touching and beautiful. Their need to connect with audiences in a way that was really inspiring.

8. Home Gym

It keeps me sane because I no longer dance, but we still need to get moving and get that energy out as most dancers will tell you. So it’s been a nice little respite and it’s hard to make excuses when it’s literally two steps from my bedroom. But I still find a way to make excuses.

9. Robin Roberts on “Good Morning America”

She’s such a fan of the company, and I just love her indescribable spirit. I’ve watched her for years through some of the tough times in her life. People like that have so much to teach us about grace under fire and about courage being not the absence of fear but the presence of it, and the desire to go forward anyway.

10. Backyard Time

If you had asked somebody who knew me years ago and you said, “Oh yeah, he has a backyard and a dog,” they would have said, “You have the wrong person.” No way! That being in nature sort of changed my feelings around. It’s those little things that you can control, watching a tomato plant go from this little nothing and struggle up then bear fruit. And dogs I love because no matter what, they’re happy to see you. It doesn’t hurt if you have a risk in your reach. Then they’re doubly happy to see you.”

The New York Times
Robert Battle Likes to Cook, and Connect
By: Kathryn Shattuck
August 9, 2020
This season, the Ailey member Jacqueline Green has reached a new level.

By GIA KOURLAS

Jacqueline Green was a shy 13-year-old when her mother, considering possible schools in Baltimore, observed two qualities that her daughter possessed. “You’re the pretty one,” Ms. Green recalled saying. “You’re flexible.”

Soon after, Ms. Green found herself at a dance audition for Baltimore School for the Arts. It was not only her first audition, it was also her first ballet class. “I had on Pey-

less tights and shoes, and I don’t know how she found a kid like me,” Ms. Green said. “I had my hair slicked back in this bun and I thought, ‘People actually do this? Holding your arm out like this?’”

But then there was the flexibility test. As she got it, “I was like, oh, I’ve got this — I watch TV in this position.”

She was accepted. That Ms. Green, now a supremely elegant member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, began training so late is remarkable, but her flexibility is so natural as to be second nature.

Regal and schooled, she has delicate, limestone structure and willowy limbs — she’s 5 foot-9 — which add to her unflinched elegance. She can be stiff, she can be yielded, but her intensity remains.

“I’ve learned to trust myself,” said Jacqueline Green, who now up dance relates very late.
An Ailey Dancer's Goddess Quality

Janine Gordon, who joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1981, has been a dancer with the company and has become a goddess figure within it.

In the beginning of her career, Mr. Green was introduced to the company by Mr. Alvin Ailey himself. Mr. Green was later promoted to the position of Associate Artistic Director and eventually became the Artistic Director of the company. Mr. Green is known for his dedication to the company and his commitment to the development of young dancers.

Janine Gordon is a dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. She was born in Jamaica, New York, and began dancing at the age of seven. She attended the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater School and later joined the company as a soloist in 1981.

Since joining the company, Janine Gordon has become a prominent figure within the organization. Her dancing has been widely praised for its technical skill and emotional depth. She has been recognized for her ability to communicate the story through her movements.

In a recent interview, Janine Gordon spoke about her experiences with Mr. Green, expressing gratitude for his guidance and support. She also spoke about the importance of education and the need for continued support for young dancers.

"Mr. Green has always been there for me," she said. "He has been my mentor and guide throughout my career. He has always encouraged me to continue to pursue my passion and to never give up on my dreams."

Janine Gordon has also spoken about the impact of Mr. Green's leadership on the company. She has praised his ability to create a supportive and inclusive environment where dancers can thrive.

"Mr. Green has always been committed to creating a space where dancers feel valued and respected," she said. "He has always been there to listen and to offer guidance and support.

Janine Gordon's passion and dedication to her craft have earned her a reputation as a goddess within the company. Her influence is felt not only on the dance floor but also in the hearts of those who work with her. She is a true inspiration to all who have the privilege of working with her.

Janine Gordon's legacy will continue to inspire and motivate future generations of dancers. Her dedication to her craft and her commitment to the development of young talent is a testament to her influence within the company and beyond.

In conclusion, Janine Gordon's goddess quality is not just a title but a reflection of her deep commitment to her craft and her ability to inspire others. Her dedication to the company and to the growth of young dancers is a true testament to her leadership and her impact on the dance world.

For more information about Janine Gordon and her career with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, please visit their official website.
why dance

Jamar Roberts
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater dancer and resident choreographer

Some of my earliest memories are of being outside in the blazing heat of Miami’s eternal summer, my friends and cousins and I all gathered around a boom box, blasting the best mixtape we could make. All it took was for one song that everyone loved for us to start dancing like mad. And in all of our preoccupied glory, we began to show off for one another; the latest moves we learned from movies and music videos. The Kid n’ Play, the running man, the moonwalk, the stomp-and-grind. We invented step routines or worried tirelessly at perfecting what was better known nowadays as twerking. With each attempt, we would put a new spin on the moves to make them our own, in hopes of putting the others to complete shame. But more so to simply give them something to laugh about. This is where dance began for me. Dance as play.

Dancing has always been a huge part of the culture that I grew up in. The freedom and agency over one’s own body was always permissible, especially upon hearing your favorite song. Even as a kid, I witnessed the power of dance and its ability to focus the mind, liberate the body, lift the spirit and bring people together.

It comes very naturally to me. I feel more myself when I dance than I do at any other moment in my life. It’s where I am my most honest and my imagination is unbound. Dance is my playground, and the music is my best friend. Just as it’s always been.

“Dance is my playground, and the music is my best friend.”
POETRY IN MOTION

At Valentino, words, passion, and fashion collide By Keziah Weir

In an ode to freedom of expression, Valentino creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli commissioned poets Greta Bellamacina, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Robert Montgomery, and Mustafa the Poet for original work, which was collected in a slim volume called On Love. Selections, like 23-year-old Grammy winner Mustafa’s poignant line, pictured above, appear on the clothing itself. The gift: Love triumphs.

The notion resonates with Alvin Ailey dancer Courtney Celeste Spears, currently closing out an international tour. Ailey’s signature ballet, Revelations, is a bluesy, gospel-filled celebration of black American heritage; its exultant ending translates to audiences from New York to Copenhagen. “No matter what language barrier, race, ethnicity, religion,” Spears says, “love is love.”
Feeling the Beat
By: Courtney Celeste Spears
May/June 2019 Issue

DANCER TO DANCER
off the record

FEELING the Beat
As told to Courtney Celeste Spears

How Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s Samantha Figgins’ hearing loss has affected her dancing

Samantha Figgins is currently in her fifth season with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (and was a Dance Spirit cover girl back in 2013). Not many people know that the gorgeous dancer suffers from single-sided deafness. As a baby, Figgins contracted spinal meningitis, which caused her to lose all hearing in her right ear. She never gave up on her dance dreams, though, and fought her way through uncomfortable situations, never missing an opportunity to learn and grow. Now, after getting her first pair of hearing aids, she opens up about her path to success. —Courtney Celeste Spears

I come from an artistic family: I’m one of four girls, and all of us (including my twin sister, Jenelle) are dancers. While we were growing up in DC, my mother put my oldest sister in dance first, but I eventually fell in love with it, too. I studied at Duke Ellington School of the Arts and later attended SUNY Purchase Conservatory. I danced and toured with Complexions Contemporary Ballet for four years, before joining Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. I’m filled with so much joy and gratitude to be where I am, especially now, as I’m able to reflect back on my journey, and the work it took to overcome a disability that could’ve held me back from my dreams.

When I was 10 months old, I had spinal meningitis, which put me in the hospital for 10 weeks and caused me to lose all hearing in my right ear. Ever since, I’ve lived with single-sided deafness, which in time turned into auditory processing disorder (APD)—when the brain has difficulty processing speech.
It was hard growing up with single-sided deafness. I found myself not fully invested in conversations because I couldn't understand what was being said. It made me more of an introvert, because it was exhausting trying to play catch-up. Conversations would feel like fill-in-the-blank puzzles, where I'd have to rely on body language, context clues, or hand gestures to figure out what I was missing.

I did know one thing: I loved to dance. It saved me. Without dance, it would've been easier for me to be less interactive and less engaged with those around me. But dance made me focus. It made me an observant, hard worker. My disability fueled me to be the best dancer I could be.

This past year, I got my first pair of hearing aids. It's completely changed my interactions, the way I'm able to be present myself, and the way I approach my dancing. I used to get anxious when a teacher or choreographer was speaking, afraid I'd miss something important. Even standing at the barre on my right side would make me uneasy. My hearing aids have opened my world in so many ways—from things like feeling more balanced when dancing to being excited about conversations and interactions. But it's become clear to me that my work ethic and constant goal of perfection is what made me strong, resilient, and got me here today.

Being open about my journey with hearing loss has allowed me to share my story with my co-workers, my mentee who also suffers from single-sided deafness, and other dancers in the community. Dancing with AAADT has been a dream, and has afforded me the opportunity to connect to a greater purpose. Looking back, I wouldn't call my hearing loss a curse. It's ultimately been a blessing. I'm constantly reminded that I'm perfect the way I am.

To any young person who may be suffering from deafness, I encourage you to always believe in yourself and trust in the gift you've been given. Small obstacles are always a gift, because they build your strength. Don't give in to your insecurities. Take whatever you've been given and make it shine—because your story is one that needs to be shared. 

Courtney Celeste Spears is a dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and a graduate of the Ailey/Fordham BFA program in dance.

“My disability fueled me to be the best dancer I could be.”

(Third from left) Performing Wayne McGregor'sMaps with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.
Judith Jamison Takes Us Through 60 Years of Alvin Ailey’s Brilliance

By: Britni Danielle
May 3, 2019

When Judith Jamison joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1965, there were 10 dancers in the company. Today, six decades after Ailey and a small group of black dancers gave their inaugural performance at the 92nd Street Y in New York City, his legacy now includes more than 250 original ballets, 30 dancers, a robust educational and training program, and sold-out performances all across the globe.

According to Jamison, who Ailey picked to lead the company as its artistic director in 1989, working with the visionary founder was "a spiritual experience."

"When you're working with someone who you love working with it's like a spiritual experience," she says via phone from her home in New York. "There's an intimacy involved that when you have a rehearsal you're standing in a really sacred place and when someone's creating something you, or if you're writing something, it's a very special place to be."

While many have often cited Jamison as Ailey's muse, the veteran dancer says everyone he worked with inspired him in some way.

"We're all a part of his legacy, generation by generation," she explains. "But if you had the pleasure of having this man stand with you to push forward your blackness, your heritage, your history, your culture and say, 'You kings and queens get out on the stage and show what excellence is and how much you love doing what you're doing — and you better be good at it,' you can't help but feel blessed, according to Jamison.

As the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater prepares for its Lincoln Center season, what better way to reflect on the impact of Ailey's genius than by taking a look at some rarely-seen images from over the years and talking with Jamison, one of the people who worked closely by his side and knew him best.

Life Lessons From Mr. Ailey

"There are a few of us left who actually worked with Mr. Ailey," Jamison says, noting she still calls him Mr. Ailey out of respect for her mentor. One lesson that has stuck with her over the years is that he always reminded each dancer to stay humble.

"Remember where you came from, always have that in mind," Jamison says, repeating Ailey's advice. "Remember this gift that you have, who you have to give it back to, and who you have to share it with."

According to Jamison, Ailey would also remind the dancers to ask themselves, "Who are you doing these performances for anyway? Is it to make yourself feel all puffed up, or to share something with the audience that brings them back to their humanity, and brings them back to who they are as people?"

For Jamison and Ailey, the answer was clear.

Ailey's Legacy? Excellence
Though millions of people have seen the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in person, Jamison doesn't believe the visionary behind it all was thinking about the impact of his work after he was gone. "When you're in it, and you're actually doing something, you're thinking of what you're doing," she explains.

But that doesn't mean Ailey did not have a distinct point of view. "We knew we were celebrating the modern dance tradition of our country, our culture, and our traditions," she says. "Beyond that, we knew about the generosity of the art form. If you could dance, he would say, 'If you were blue with polka dots then you could be in this company if you were excellent.'

"The mantra of excellence and loving what you do, and being who you are as a person — and loving yourself and understanding yourself, and keeping that clear — was clear to him," she says.

Very Black, Very Proud

When he started the dance company in 1958, Ailey wanted black folks to control their own narratives and the way their stories were told.

"I think that he was thinking that we needed our images — our multi-layered selves — exhibited on stage. We were being seen in a certain light and portrayed by other people, and he thought it was very profound to say something about our culture — our African American culture, where it came from, and what's happened in the diaspora, and how we created our culture here [in America] that has its roots in the Motherland. He was saying all that," Jamison explains.

"But [did he know] that this would end up being a 60-year institution? That his name would be heralded forever? I doubt it," she says. "Because when you're in the creative process you don't think that — you hope.

"He was trying to get the work done of telling the truth about who we were as human beings and creative people of great intelligence, and understanding that we needed to purvey that truth in the works that we did."

The Community Matters

Ailey didn't just believe in taking his dancers on the road to perform at venues around the world, he wanted to touch those who couldn't make it to the theater as well.

"It was very important for us to connect to the communities that we served from the beginning, before they started talking about outreach. We were reaching out already," Jamison says.

"The whole mantra of Ailey is that we're not just dancing on stage. We go outside and give master classes, lectures and demonstrations, and workshops to people who might not get to the theater," she says.

Thinking Globally

A year after Jamison joined the company, Ailey took the dance troupe to Africa for the World Festival of Black Arts, a month-long celebration in Dakar, Senegal.

"It was huge. Langston Hughes was there, and Duke Ellington, and Katherine Dunham, and everyone from the diaspora, and everybody from all over the continent," Jamison recalls. "So, I have all those memories, but it's how I can sit in the audience now and watch these extraordinary dancers continue his legacy."
The World Festival of Black Arts wasn't the only time Ailey hit the road. The company also traveled to Paris, Brazil, and in 1967, Ailey toured nine countries on the African continent in just two months. According to Jamison, the trip was a revelatory experience.

"When you grow up, as my generation did, and see all these Tarzan movies and all these pretend African things, and then you actually step off the plane and you smell it, sense it, and taste it, oh my God, is that a revelation!"

It’s All About the Truth

For Ailey, according Jamison, telling the truth was paramount. "Being direct and truthful about the black experience, and taking it around the world, says something to other people who are still crazy about this company 60 years later," she says.

"They're watching your truthfulness and who you are, and they connect to what you're doing as human beings," Jamison continues. "So that's why the company can go around the world and everybody understands what we're talking about. He's giving everyone the opportunity to see this predominantly black company and see them do all kinds of dance, influenced by all kinds of culture."

"When people see excellence and truthfulness in dance, and they see committed people on the stage who are trying to tell you something about who you are — because they already know who they are — it just works. And that's why I believe the company is so globally understood because Mr. Ailey was so specific about telling the truth about who we are as people," she says.

Jamison credits Ailey's commitment to the truth as one of the things that has helped the dance company remain relevant and popular for the past six decades.

"If you're telling the truth it'll last," she says. "If you are clear on your purpose, and who you are and what you have to give to this world — what you have to say about not dancing in a vacuum, but dancing for people. This is not an elitist art form. Dance is for people. Dance came from people and needs to be delivered back to people. Mr. Ailey always said that.

"If you get up there and do something phony, people will know it and word will go around. But word goes around brilliantly about Mr. Ailey because he was true to his art form, he was a genius of a choreographer, and he also embraced everyone else by being specific about who he was and who we are."

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will conclude its North American tour this month, before beginning its Lincoln Center season in New York City in June.
PERPETUAL MOTION

The photographs in this section are from The New York Times archives, which consist of some six million prints — some dating back more than 100 years. The Past Tense storytelling team chose the images from thousands of dance photos and commissioned commentary from the ballerina Misty Copeland (Pages 8-13, 44-49) and an essay from the writer Zadie Smith (Pages 28-29). Additional pictures from The Times's archives are published every day on Instagram @nytarchives.
UPLIFT!

By ZADIE SMITH

When I was about 12, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater came to town and my mother took me to see them. It was a trip for just us two, and I was a little reluctant, suspecting some species of racial uplift, which I felt I could receive far more easily by staying in my room, listening to Monie Love and watching Cameo’s “Word Up” video on repeat. I was suspicious of racial uplift in general. The way it always seemed to point in the same direction, toward the supposed “higher” arts: the theater but not the television, opera singers but not beatboxers, ballet dancers but not body-poppers. No Jamaican mother ever ran into a kid’s bedroom, waving a cassette, crying: “Have you heard ‘Push It’? It’s by some brilliant young ladies from New York!” Yet I couldn’t imagine anything on the legitimate stage meaning as much to me as Salt-N-Pepa’s bump and grind.

Off we went — and it was a ravishment. Nothing prepares you for the totality of Alvin Ailey: the aural, visual, physical, spiritual beauty. Up to that point, most high-culture excursions (usually school trips) had felt like sky training for a lifetime of partly satisfying adult aesthetic experiences: nice singing but absurd story, or good acting but incomprehensible 400-year-old text, and so on. To be permitted to hear the thickly stacked, honeyed gospel of “Wade in the Water,” while simultaneously watching those idealized, muscular arms — in every shade of brown — slowly rise and assume the shape of so many ancient amphoras! Heaven. And then below the regality and poise of the upper body, beneath the waist, there continued the bastardized bump and grind from MTV; coming full circle to meet its call-and-response West African roots. Everywhere you looked: sensory pleasure. In place of the saccharine costume confections of “The Nutcracker,” here were down-home, flowing, church-white gowns, stunning against so much shining dark skin, and redolent of the American South, a dream place I’d visited only in books and song. It dawned on me that I was watching neither high nor low culture but rather a wholly unified thing.

Ailey’s all-encompassing vocabulary included the athletes from the running tracks and the fly-girls from the videos, the swaying of church ministers and the hip-switching of Caribbean dance hall and carnival. A diaspora of movement, in short. All fingertips stretched to the sky, all leaps seemed weightless, the whole logic tended upward. “Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel well?” asked the gospel choir, and then pushed the question further from the biblical to the political: “Then why not every man?” Deliverance. From shackles, from oppression, from stereotype and misidentification, from prejudice, from any form of restraint, even that proposed by gravity. Toward freedom. (I note that in the photo the minister is the only one encumbered with shoes.)

To me, all dance is a discourse on freedom, but in black dance, for obvious reasons, this discourse has been as much literal as figurative. Which fact makes it impossible not to see this photograph as history as much as choreography, although it is an image in which the “black body” is not solely a site of pain, suffering and exploitation — as it is often depicted today — but also the locus of an extraordinary joy. At the shimmering point at which archetypes (“the black body”) become individuals and then icons, I spy, in this image of uplift, Bishop Richard Allen, Marsha Hunt and Joseph Cinque leaping into history, or the Rev. Al Green, Lauryn Hill and Bill T. Jones ascending toward the sublime. And each spring, now that I live in New York, I don’t have to go very far at all to get another shot of Ailey’s soaring delights.

AFTERWORD

Six months ago, the newly formed Past Tense team began sifting through the treasure chest that is the New York Times archives, where some six million photographs are filed away. Photographs of dance quickly emerged as one of the most enduring themes, with photos that date back more than 100 years. Most of those photos are of ordinary people, and that’s what we’ve highlighted here: from slow dances to the Twist, from the mambo to the mosh pit. Choreographers and professional dancers, like our guest editor, Misty Copeland, are scattered throughout, in part because it’s in them that we find not just the highest elevation of the form, but a metaphor for possibility that extends far beyond the realm of dance. In her essay here, the novelist Zadie Smith remembers a performance by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from her childhood as nothing less than “a ravishment.” Oprah Winfrey, talking to The Times about Ailey’s company in 1996, said much the same: “It makes us feel better about ourselves, that you can live better, that you can fly.” This section is devoted to the world of dancers, both off and onstage, who help keep alive that dream of flight.

VERONICA CHAMBERS, editor, Past Tense
The Passionate Humility of Solomon Dumas

By Gia Kourlas
December 28, 2018

This Alvin Ailey dancer, the first to go from AileyCamp to the main company, has had a breakout season with leading roles in two major premieres.

By GIA KOURLAS

A dancer isn’t always born a dancer. Sometimes a mother has to step in.

Growing up on the South Side of Chicago with his single working mother, Solomon Dumas was involved in community theater and interested in the arts. But dance wasn’t much of a presence in his life until his mother signed him up for AileyCamp, when he was 12.

“She made me go,” Mr. Dumas said. “My mother kept me busy. There wasn’t a lot of idle time. She kept me in programs.” AileyCamp turned out to be a good choice.

“After that camp, I was completely obsessed,” he said. “We learned discipline through dance and we started each day with affirmations. I remember receiving a souvenir program book, and I had never seen so many beautiful people in my life. I said, Oh my gosh, they look like me. Or I want to look like them. There was this ele-

‘He doesn’t dance small and he doesn’t apologize when he’s dancing. It’s like butter and fire at the same time.’

RONALD E. BROWN
CHOREOGRAPHER

gance, this sophistication. And that was something that I needed to see at that time.”

Mr. Dumas, nearing his third year in Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, is the only member to have started as an Ailey camper and gone on to join the main company. (AlleyCamp — there were 10 in 2018 — are summer day camps for ages 11-14.) “I didn’t realize I forced him,” his mother, Beverly Rogers, said laughing. “It was just he went wherever I said to go. He never complained. He may have grunted a little bit, but I didn’t pay any attention.”

Ms. Rogers can’t say that she knew he was a dancer or an actor as a child, but recalled that before he could walk, whenever he heard music, he would bounce.

At 30, Mr. Dumas seems to have retained some of that energy. Even when seated for an interview in the lounge at New York City Center — where the Ailey company’s season continues through Sunday — his body...
was full of vibrations that extended to slender fingers drumming rhythms on a table or gesticulating into the air. It’s an energy that has been radiating from the stage this season, a spectacular one for Mr. Dumas, who danced leading parts in new works by Ronald K. Brown (“The Call”) and Rennie Harris (“Lazarus”).

Created as part of the company’s 60th anniversary, and each in its way a homage to Alley, they are two of the most important and affecting dances of the year — not just at the Alley company, but period. They’re meaningful, even masterly additions to the repertory, giving the company something to sink its physical and emotional weight into. That came through in the dancing, which was full of reverence and urgency.

In both premieres, Mr. Dumas showed his range, his unforced strength and his quiet, simmering power. He isn’t flashy; his grounded presence is what makes him so beguiling. Robert Battle, the company’s artistic director, said he had been especially moved by Mr. Dumas this season. "I almost didn’t recognize him in a good way," Mr. Battle said. "He’s kind of a chameleon."

The circumstances under which Mr. Dumas performed the lead in “The Call” were stressful. The morning of its premiere was just an ordinary day when he noticed that Masazumi Chaya, the group’s associate artistic director, was watching company class. That was odd enough, but stranger still was that Mr. Chaya was watching him.

It turned out that Jamar Roberts, scheduled to dance the lead, was injured, and Mr. Brown, the choreographer, wanted Mr. Dumas to take over. Mr. Dumas was panicked. He didn’t know the steps; his focus had been on his part in the dance’s trio.

"I had to basically learn it within an hour," Mr. Dumas said. "I was like, 'I’m not ready, I’m not ready.'" But Mr. Brown pulled him aside. "When he asked me, I couldn’t say no," said Mr. Dumas, who used to be a member of Mr. Brown’s company. "You don’t say no to Ron."

The two first worked together when Mr. Dumas was a student at the Alley school. After Mr. Dumas completed two years with Alley II, the company’s junior division, he joined Mr. Brown’s troupe. "I just waited my turn," Mr. Brown said.

Mr. Dumas knows about waiting his turn.

His path to the main company hasn’t been a direct one. After his AlleyCamp experience, he attended the Chicago Academy for the Arts as well as at the Russell Talbert Dance Studio, where he continued his training after school. There, his focus was ballet. "I was in the studio until about 9 p.m. every day, even sometimes on Sundays."

Before he trained at the Alley school, he was a member of Garth Fagan Dance. After leaving Mr. Brown’s company, he was weighing his options. He was an instructor at Barry’s Bootcamp, and had started acting classes. But there was an Alley audition and he decided to go. It was his fifth try, and there was only one male spot open.

"I always thought if I got into the company it would be during this mass exodus when there were maybe four spots," he said. "I never thought that I would be the one guy. Because I wasn’t the tall guy. I wasn’t the leggy guy. I was never that dancer known for the tricks and the things you would associate Alley with."

Yet for Mr. Brown, he has a kind of passionate humility. "He goes for broke, but not because he’s trying to impress you — and not like he even knows," he said. "He takes over the stage and is still kind of unassuming. He doesn’t dance small and he doesn’t apologize when he’s dancing. It’s like butter and fire at the same time."

This season, Mr. Dumas said he was grateful to spend so much time in the studio with choreographers like Mr. Brown, Mr. Harris and Twyla Tharp, who worked with him closely on "The Golden Section" (1981). The day she arrived was a memorable one. "I open the piece and as soon as I went across the floor, she stopped the music," he said. "I said, Oh God, this is the most embarrassing thing. She came to me and said: Look at me. You’re holding back."

He started over; she stopped the music again and told him again, more firmly, that he was holding back. "And then I did it — he snapped his fingers — I don’t know what clicked in. She said, That’s what I’m talking about. She kind of broke me down."

Mr. Tharp worked with the company for a week and spent so much time with Mr. Dumas that Mr. Battle said he wondered, "Is she going to take him and leave with him?" She taught him about daring: The difference between simply performing a role and dancing like you’re not afraid to fall down.

But while Mr. Dumas is enjoying each challenge, he said he’s not one of those dancers who plans to stay in the company for 20 years. "Heh, no," he said, laughing. "But only because there are so many other things that I want to do dance-wise — and everything else."

At the same time, he knows that, well, you never know. He said he was shocked when Mr. Battle hired him.

"I did have an emotional moment because I thought back to being an Alley camper," he said of learning the news in Mr. Battle’s office. "I still have his handkerchief. He told me that he liked my dancing and that he had no idea that I was coming. There were no preconceived ideas or notions — I wasn’t on the radar. I just came in and he said, ‘Wow — O.K., I’ll go with him! I’m so glad he took the chance.’"
When Alvin Ailey set out to start his own dance company in New York City in 1958, he likely had no idea his passion and call to dance would result in a nearly 85,000-square-foot performance center bearing his name and thousands of students entering its doors day after day, while company dancers traveled to perform his choreography on stages around the globe. He certainly couldn't have known his effort to create a safe and esteemed place for dancers from all walks of life would extend well past his 1989 death, some 30 years.

Yet, here we are now, 60 years after Ailey first launched the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and the performing arts theater as well as its educational component, The Ailey School, is still flourishing exceedingly. The Ailey center is honoring the life and blood memories of Ailey with it's special "Ailey Ascending" 60th-anniversary celebration, including worldwide performances of Ailey's most revered choreography with the addition of new works created as a thank you to the mastermind behind the theater and school.

Newsweek talked to Judith Jamison, the Artistic Director Emerita who helmed the company from 1989 to 2011, her successor Robert Battle and a number of company dancers about the significance of Ailey's legacy. Read Newsweek's interview with a few members of the Ailey company below.

Judith Jamison, Artistic Director Emerita
What does the 60th anniversary mean to you?
It means generations of dancers and audiences have been sharing the love of what Mr. Ailey created 60 years ago. It takes [the audience], the incredible dancers in the company, our school and Mr. Ailey's genius to get to where we are now. We’re living on his afterburn, we’re living on the life he left us. The 60th anniversary is about celebrating the African American cultural expression and experience in the modern dance tradition of our country and serving our communities, but it’s also about the love of a man who was a creative genius, who loved people. Mr. Ailey loved people, all walks of life, and he wanted his dancers and his company to be so accessible to everyone. It wasn’t elitist, it wasn’t only for certain people. It was for everyone. He always said, “Dance came from the people and should be delivered back to the people.” And it’s true. So we’re living on the seeds that he planted 60 years ago.

Do you think he expected the company to go on for this long?
I don’t know if he ever thought it was gonna continue this long or that we loved him this much to continue operating. If he was here today, I know he’d be smiling from ear to ear. He’d be so proud of us, as I am proud of the company now and the magnificent job they’re doing on tour around the world, teaching. Think of where we started. He started with eight dancers and one performance. Here we are 60 years later in the beautiful state of the art Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater with outreach programs, extension programs, BSA programs and kids coming to study with us. Parents are bringing them as early as age 2. The junior students, the senior students, the professional students—it just goes on and on and on. Ailey camps, all over. Ten camps! It started with just one in Kansas City. Mr. Ailey thought this up. We’re living on his dreams. We celebrate him every time the company comes on stage and that curtain goes up. When that dance starts, we are celebrating Alvin Ailey and what he did for us.

Robert Battle, Artistic Director since 2011
What does this 60th anniversary mean to you?
It means Mr. Ailey’s legacy continues to thrive, not just survive. For a modern dance company, actually any arts organization, longevity can be very difficult. When you think about a company surviving the death of its founder, Alvin Ailey, to now me being only the third artistic director after Judith Jamison, for it to continue to grow, to have our own permanent home with all of this wonderful space in New York City, I think it serves as a time to look back and reflect on where the company started and where we are today. So it really is an opportunity to reflect and then to spring forward into the future.
People always say how Mr. Ailey was passionate about giving other dancers the chance to showcase their choreography. You recently introduced a few new pieces into the repertoire for the 60-year celebration. Was that intentional?

It’s important because it’s a part of the continuum. That sense of nurturing new voices, new dances, new choreographers, it is vital to this organization because that means we have a future. So nurturing choreographers, as much as it is a selfless act it’s a selfish act in the sense of needing those voices so that we can continue. There is certainly something in the culture of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater that is very much about paying it forward. That, to me, is the lifeblood—certainly in the African American community—this idea of when you get over you reach back and you bring back as many people as you can. So beyond it being a programmatic thing, it really is a part of the heartbeat of this company because Alvin Ailey was so generous that way. That really is the foundation of this company.

Constance Stamatiou, Company Dancer since 2007

What does this 60th anniversary mean to you?

It’s 60 years of keeping a man’s vision alive, his legacy. It’s inspiring. This was a small dream that he had and look how grand it’s become! I wonder what he’d think about Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater now? Did he ever think his company would be this big, traveling all over the world and having so many outreach programs accessible for people everywhere of all ages? It’s really special to be a part of.

How does it feel to be a young woman so heavily involved in maintaining the history and everything Mr. Ailey set out to do when he first launched the school and theater 60 years ago?

It’s been quite the journey. I moved to New York from North Carolina to study at SUNY Purchase and I had a teacher there who taught at [Ailey’s] summer program. She brought me to the summer program, and when I came here I was just in awe. I had never seen so many kids that looked like me, brown kids, in class. Growing up, I was usually the token girl in class. So I was awestruck about that and about the quality [in the way] the students were moving. There was so much passion, so much fire. It’s just something about Mr. Ailey’s choreography that touches everybody’s soul. It draws you in. It’s something you can relate to—how he always talks about "Revelations" being about his blood memories, growing up in the south in Rogers, Texas. Being a part of a company that celebrates all races and made a leeway for people of color to be involved in this art is truly extraordinary. I’m very grateful to be a part of.

Courtney Celeste Spears, First-Year Company Dancer

How does it feel to be a part of such a rich dance legacy created by Mr. Ailey, a black man from Jim-Crow south?

It’s magical to walk on to a stage every day and being constantly reminded that there’s so much more and you’re a part of something that is so much larger than yourself. To walk into this space that’s honoring 60 years of a legacy and tradition and honoring the mastermind, the genius behind all of it, is quite special. It’s such a privilege and honor to be a part of something so grand.

Why is it important to spread Mr. Ailey’s legacy now in today’s society?

One of the most beautiful things about art and dance specifically is that it brings people together. It’s something that unites people from all backgrounds, races, ethnicities, religion. It’s timeless. One of the biggest things we’re told all the time is that Mr. Ailey said, “Dance came to the people and should be given back to the people.” We’re in a time now where there’s so much tension surrounding race and ethnicity and what you look like and political differences, but one of the beautiful things I think the Ailey company and Mr. Ailey has given us is timeless quality and energy that no matter where you’re coming from in the world, no matter what language you speak, what political party you’re with, your race—Ailey’s work hits you at a core level, your soul. It’s human.

It’s so important to have places like this where people can feel united in what they’re watching and the experience they’re having when coming to see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. It’s so important for young brown girls and boys and Latino boys and girls and Asian girls and boys to see people that look like them on stage thriving and not being portrayed as anything other than the beautiful God-given creatures they are and to see their history being explored and executed in complete living motion on stage. It’s also great to teach people about a history that they might not be familiar with, people who did not grow up understanding African American hymns, rituals and baptisms or what it meant to grow up in the south for someone like Mr. Ailey.
That’s the history for some audience members and it’s a full circle moment for them, but for some, I feel like Mr. Ailey’s work shows them a completely different perspective of what the black body can do and the way we celebrate it.

Solomon Dumas, Company Dancer since 2016
What does it mean to be a part of the company during this milestone achievement?

It means everything to me. Being an African American man and being able to have this platform to share my passion and to know that this has lasted 60 years and it’s still thriving and it’s still valid, it’s still current, I’m blessed and thankful. I’m full of gratitude that we’re still able to tour. The organization is still growing. I’m thankful for the organization because it’s given me an opportunity to travel the world. It’s given me the opportunity to be educated and to be an ambassador. I’m really proud to be a part of an organization that celebrates the African American heritage in the modern dance tradition. We use dance as our way of educating people. We travel the world, we travel the country and we share our black excellence. We’re still doing the work to acknowledge our own presence and our contributions as African Americans and this organization has put so many people on the map. It’s helped artists of color, dancers of colors, choreographers of color, lighting directors of color, costume designers of color, composers of color. Ailey company celebrates that heritage and has been doing so for 60 years.

What is the biggest thing you’ve learned from your experience with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater?

The black experience is valid and it needs to be shared. Mr. Ailey created a piece called “Revelations” and it’s one of the most famous works he’s choreographed. It was choreographed in 1960, and it was a very prolific piece at that time and it still is. The thing about “Revelations” is it’s based off his blood memories. His earlier character works are based off his blood memories of growing up in the segregated south, so it’s his point of reference, his history. Of course, growing up in the segregated south at that time, the church was the hallmark of civilization for black people. He choreographed that piece based off his memories, but it shows our humanity, that we are human too and we experience joy and pain. It’s a triumphant story nonetheless. No matter what you throw at us we tackle it, we persevere. And so that is the story that everybody can relate to. It’s an unspoken communication and there’s no denying this is a black piece that celebrates the black experience, but it’s almost like a piece of history encapsulated. It’s a period piece that shows you the African American story and how triumphant it is and how persevering it is and that transcends itself throughout the organization.
THE MAGIC OF
REVELATIONS

BY JEN PETERS

Even today, Ailey’s masterpiece remains a powerful ode to the resilience of the human spirit.

In 1960, America was in the midst of a social transformation. The Supreme Court had ruled "separate but equal" unconstitutional six years prior, but the country’s response was slow and turbulent as desegregation incited violent responses. Surrounded by powerful civil rights momentum, a 29-year-old Alvin Ailey created an ode to the resilience of the human spirit: Revelations. "Alvin was making a statement about African-American cultural experience, saying, 'Hey, this is who we are, we live here, we were born here,'" says Judith Jamison, artistic director emerita of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. "It was a brave action. Civil rights were roaring, and our protest was our performance."

Even today, Revelations presents a compelling plea for society through its renderings of the highs and lows of our human condition.

“When I look at recent events in this country and hear rhetoric that is more than a throwback to the Jim Crow era," says current AAADT artistic director Robert Battle, "I know that now, more than ever, Revelations is urgently needed."

The piece has made a profound impact. AAADT dancers perform Revelations hundreds, even thousands, of times in the course of their careers. Their bodies carry not only the steps, but the weight and historical relevance of the piece. "I haven’t danced it in years, but I remember every step I ever learned," says Jamison, whose performances as the umbrella woman helped propel her to stardom. "You feel whole by the time the curtain comes down. No matter how many times you perform or see it, it lifts you."
THE BIRTH OF A MASTERWORK

While creating Revelations—one of his earliest works—Alley was searching for personal, artistic and cultural identity. He investigated what he described as his ancestral “blood memories,” and his personal history growing up an only child in rural segregated Texas, attending Baptist churches with his single mother, being overwhelmed by spiritual gospel music. Divided into three sections, his narrative journeys through a mournful “Pilgrim of Sorrow”; the baptismal second section, “Take Me to the Water”; and “Move Members, Move,” depicting an uplifting spiritual community. “Revelations” began with the music. As early as I can remember I was enthralled by the music played and sung in small black churches,” Alley described in his memoir Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Alley. He wrote that he was also stirred by the sculptures of Henry Moore, the writings of Langston Hughes, and the technical elements of Martha Graham and her mentor Lester Horton: “Moore’s work inspired the costumes made of jersey in the first part. When the body moves, the jersey takes on extraordinary tensions.”

The piece premiered in New York City at the 92nd Street Y on Sunday, January 31, 1960, with nine dancers including Alley, and live musicians. “The theater was packed,” recalls Sylvia Waters, a former Alley II director, and current director of the Alley Legacy Residency. “I was in the balcony, and when the curtain came down there was a moment of silence and then an eruption of clapping, stamping...it was huge!” The original version was a full hour, which Alley said he then “snipped, cut, pushed and pulled down to a half hour.”

THE SNAG TO SUCCESS

Reaching the pinnacle of his choreographic career early on, Alley struggled at times with his personal relationship to Revelations. “He sometimes referred to Revelations as ‘the albatross around his neck,’” says Waters. “He was frustrated, always being put in that box, because he created 79 ballets and many thought this was the only piece he ever created!”

PASSING IT ON

As Revelations approaches 60 years of nearly uninterrupted performances, Alley’s hopeful message continues to spread. “Alvin Alley was able to create a work about faith in God, yet it transcends religion,” says Battle. “Revelations has a way of breaking through spiritual and language barriers.”

Battle has witnessed the passing of the torch firsthand since becoming director in 2011. “I see new dancers in their first performance, or longtime dancers moving into iconic roles—it connects them to the past, to Alvin Alley himself. It is a powerful, moving experience,” says Battle, who sometimes marks the movement in the wings to interplay with the dancers. “I never danced Revelations myself, so (associate artistic director Masazumi) Chaya has threatened to put me into ‘yellow section’ at some point...I humbly decline!”

Jen Peters is a frequent contributor to Dance Magazine.

MOST MEMORABLE AUDIENCE REACTIONS

“When we used to perform with live music, I remember audience members bringing tambourines and playing along. They were ready like it was a church!” —JUDITH JAMISON

“In South Africa for the first time, we finished Revelations and the audience was clapping, then they started pounding their feet in unison, which we experience in Europe often. But then they started chanting something in unison, and to this day we still don’t know what it was! It was a really spiritual experience.” —MATTHEW KUSING

“Once, in Germany, we had already gone on stage and into our dressing rooms. I was about to take my eyelashes off, but the audience kept going, so Mr. Alley had us do an encore, and all the bows, several times. They closed the curtain, they opened it again—it went on for 15, maybe 20 minutes. We finally put our heads in our hands, like ‘We are tired.’ They had to lower the metal fire curtain!” —JUDITH JAMISON

REVELATIONS AS TEACHER

Over the years, the piece has become a powerful teaching tool. Alley’s Arts in Education & Community Programs created a children’s school residency, Revelations: An Interdisciplinary Approach. Aimed at grades 6–8, the program uses Alley’s life and Revelations to tie dance to language arts, social studies and even math through phrasing and counting. It also teaches movement from “I Been Buked,” “Rocka My Soul” and sometimes “Wade in the Water.”

“We examine the decade of 1960 to 1970, look at American history, world history, ask students to interview family members about their personal history,” explains Nasha Thomas, who runs the program. “They write and share stories. They like seeing how much they may have in common with Mr. Alley.” —JP
THE PRE-REVELATIONS RITUAL

"Before the curtain rises, everyone in 'I Been 'Buked' takes hands. We come together, heads bowed, and focus. It really is beautiful. Right when the curtain goes up we release hands and heads go heavenward."

—MATTHEW RUSHING

WHEN JUDITH JAMISON GOT "DEMOTED"

"The first two and a half years my favorite section was 'Fix Me, Jesus,' with Jimmy Traina. Then Constance Atlas came along and was the first person to go past the 'I' and into an arch, but I couldn't do that, so I got 'demoted' to carrying a prop... I was so mad! But I came out with that umbrella and a smile on my face. I felt lifted as I was running. Even though I was mad two seconds before, it was divine! I forgot about everything else." —JUDITH JAMISON

DANCERS' FAVORITE SECTIONS

YANNICK LEBRUN: "I Wanna Be Ready"
"You are preparing to die, and you have to be true to what the emotion is. It puts me at peace when I am onstage."

GLENN ALLEN SIMS: "I Been 'Buked"
"Feet planted in semi second position, golden light shining down on you; it is totally overwhelming. I get goosebumps just thinking about the vulnerability."

JACQUELINE GREEN: Umbrella Woman
"When she comes out, it is the first glimpse of joy. You have to embody it, see it in your run."
THE FIRST TIME...

...I Had Real Dance Shoes

By ROBERT BATTLE

I'll never forget the moment of my first dance shoes.

We didn't have a lot of money, especially when I was in elementary school, so I got "invasion" shoes; they weren't Converse—they were "new-whenever." Kids would pick on you because you didn't have trendy rama-red shoes and that was a source of anxiety to me.

But then I was 12 and my mother took me to the Stylin' shoe store in Miami to buy me genuine name-brand dress shoes, ballet slippers and mary janes. She made it private, as I had to have all of these types of shoes before my first classes started.

It was such a big deal when I got those shoes that I would even sleep with them. Just by putting them on, I had the keys to the freedom that was within me. I was hooked and connected to a magical world. The power of shoes as a symbol of selfhood, and as a metaplace, was insurmountable for me.

Anything I learned, I would try to teach the neighborhood kids. Soon I would cast them in dance videos with my compositions as the stage. I choreographed to the song "Word Up!" by Cameo, and persuaded a group of my fellow students to participate, including football players. We performed the routine for 90 min. because we were all in it. But I desired my desire to create dance, not just to perform it.

Growing up in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami had its rough edges. Two blocks away, there were drug deals and street crime, which I saw waiting in and out of school. Pretty much everyone I knew had security bars on their windows. I would see the tear in the middle of my front porch in a ballot box. It was a challenge being a kid who played classical piano, drummed and sang opera in the choir. Sometimes I was threatened so I started carrying a hatchet in my dance bag for protection. I carried myself differently, and people left me alone.

The first time I saw Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, dances from our school were being featured at a special performance for students at Jackie Mason Theater in Miami Beach. The audience was in awe of our students, and the dancers stopped and talked with equal measure and joy.

That's what I felt being bapized in my own church. "Revelations" was my story as much as it was Alvin’s. I learned it. I felt very much like the life I already knew. I could walk into a postmodern image that was much more powerful than all of the negatives I had ever seen, combined.

"It costs you nothing to use your imagination, but it will cost you everything if you don’t use it."

The highlight of the performance was "Revelations." Ailey's masterpiece, created in 1960, is the story of the civil rights movement. It's not just a story, but a state of consciousness, relating to the black experience in this country and expressing the trials, tribulations, and hope for the future of everyone who can relate. A boy who grew up in the church, I felt connected to it in a very personal way. One detail that really resonated with me was, "Wade in the Water," a depiction of a baptism. Across the stage, fabric allowed, representing the water, and dancers stepped forward and back with equal measures of fear and joy.

ROBERT BATTLE
This dancer and choreographer is artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, whose new season at City Center starts Nov. 26.
Ailey dancers charm Moscow

New artistic director takes over with message rooted in civil rights movement

BY KATHY LALLY

MOSCOW — Robert Battle smiled at Alvin Ailey and then by Judith Jamison as artistic director of a much-celebrated American modern dance company.

Battle, a 38-year-old choreographer and former dancer, was made artistic director designate more than a year ago and took over his new role Friday, while the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was on tour in Moscow.

The venue — the troupe's home is New York, about 4,700 miles and another culture away — was as curious as it was resonant. Alvin Ailey, a black man born into the deeply racist U.S. society of 1931, created his company because, as he once said, "I'm trying to say something about the beauty of people's elegance . . . and about their intelligence."

Ailey died in 1989, but his company delivered his message, eloquent and relevant as ever, to full houses in six performances at the storied Staatstheater and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater.

This visit to Russia, with performances in St. Petersburg last Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, was sponsored by the U.S. State Department and others as part of President Obama's effort to engage Russia and warm up a relationship that had been cooling. It began a year-long "American Seasons" that included an Annie Leibovitz photography exhibit and, in April, performances by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Detractors say that reset policy has meant giving Russia a pass on the arbitrary ways it often treats its citizens. If so, the Ailey performances are a reminder that cultural statements can be as powerful as the political, even if more subtle.

Ailey from C1

Ailey started the company in 1958, the year high schools in Little Rock, Ark., were closed to prevent integration and 10,000 students marched on Washington in support of integrated schools.

Although Russia's laws are not discriminatory in the manner of American Jim Crow legislation, they are arbitrarily applied, and many people here hold a deep-rooted prejudice against their fellow citizens from the Caucasian mountain regions of the country such as Chechnya and Dagestan. The ethnic groups there tend to have dark hair and be olive-skinned. Russians call them black; they are frequently demeaned and their rights violated.

Toward the end of June, a soccer fan in a mid-size city threw a banana onto the field to taunt Roberto Carlos, a Brazilian who plays for the Dagestan team. A similar incident occurred earlier this year in St. Petersburg.

The racism seems particularly virulent in the sporting world. In December, Moscow soccer fans got into a street brawl with young men from the Caucasus. In the melee, an ethnic Russian was killed, and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin laid a wreath at the spot, a gesture interpreted as taking sides before the facts were known. Days of ethnic tension ensued.

Racial profiling is so routine that on a short subway trip to the theater last week, police could be observed several times stopping Caucasian-featured young men and women, demanding to see their identification papers.

The Ailey performances offered Russians a different stage to engage with people of color. This is the home of classical ballet, and the audiences were both knowledgeable and appreciative. In the conversation with mostly Russian journalists — only one American reporter was present — Battle was pelted with admiring and well-informed questions.

"One thing Judith Jamison always does is to remind us that Mr. Ailey started the company during the civil rights movement," he said, answering a question about his sense of Ailey's original vision. "This was more than a dance company. It was a movement, and we feel connected to it."

The tradition, and the movement, he said, have been passed physically, from person to person, from place to place, in a company that now includes two Marylanders, Alicia Graf Mack from Columbia and Jacqueline Green from Baltimore.

"Here I am in a basement in Russia, talking to journalists and picking up the baton," Battle said with an easy smile. "I'm both grateful and inspired."

That evening's performance — similar to a February program in Washington — began with "Anointed," a ballet by Christopher Huggins describing Ailey turning the company over to Jamison, and now Jamison conveying it to Battle.

It concluded with "Revelations," said to be the most-performed work of modern dance ever.

During an intermission before she danced in "Revelations," Mack, who just rejoined the company, said the Russian audiences had been present and responsive.

"I tap into my deepest spiritual self on the stage," she said. "For me to be part of a company that celebrates humanity in such a beautiful way helps me be my best self."

On the stage, Mack said, she fully and deeply lived her life.

Soon, she and the others were soaking body and soul to the gospel music that has captivated so many audiences — "Wade In The Water," "Sinner Man" and "Rocks My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham."

The performance was powerful, the dancers beautiful, elegant and intelligent, and the Russian audience felt it, clapping and clapping and clapping again.