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.

**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.

**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’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.

**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.
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 repertoires 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 AlleyCamp – 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 Ailey organization.

A frequent choreographer and artist in residence at Ailey since 1999, he has set many of his works on Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II, and at The Ailey School. The Company’s repertory includes his ballets Awakening, Ella, For Four, The Hunt, In/Side, Juba, Mass, No Longer Silent, Strange Humors, Takademe 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 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 has honorary doctorates from The University of the Arts and Marymount Manhattan College. 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 June 2010 and succeeded Masazumi Chaya as Associate Artistic Director in January 2020.
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 Ailey 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 Ailey 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 Ailey 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 Ailey’s development, Mr. Rink led a $75 million capital campaign supporting Ailey’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 Ailey 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 Ailey’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, Ailey unveiled the Center’s Elaine Wynn and Family Education Wing, providing much-needed additional studios and classroom space to meet the growing demand for Ailey’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 Ailey’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 B.F.A. in theater.
THE COMPANY LEADERSHIP

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 Ailey School as a Fellowship student. Ms. Favors was a member of 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 AileyCamp in Kansas City and served as artistic director of the Camp. She is the founding director of Children’s AileyCamp New York and provided guidance in the national implementation of the AileyCamp 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.

CLIFTON BROWN  ASSISTANT REHEARSAL DIRECTOR

Clifton Brown (Goodyear, AZ) began his dance training at Take 5 Dance Academy and continued in the first class of the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program. 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, 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 (“The Bessies”). As a guest artist Mr. Brown has performed with Miami City Ballet, Rome Opera Ballet, Nevada Ballet, and Parsons Dance. 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. He has had the privilege of performing at the White House for President Obama. Mr. Brown rejoined the company in 2017.
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

JEROBOAM BOZEMAN

(Brooklyn, NY) began his training under Ruth Sistaire at the Ronald Edmonds Learning Center. He 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. He has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *Neiman Marcus*, *Double Magazine*, *Seattle Met*, and *The New York Times*. Mr. Bozeman joined the Company in 2013. Instagram: @Jeroboamb.

KHALIA CAMPBELL

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 Ailey 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 Ailey II and joined the Company in 2018.

PATRICK COKER

(Chester, VA) was awarded the American Ballet Theatre’s National Trainee Scholarship from 2008 to 2010. In May 2014, Coker graduated from the Ailey School/Fordham University BFA Program, where he apprenticed with Ailey II in his final year. After graduation, he spent a year dancing for Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, and then went on to join Jessica Lang Dance for three seasons. He has also performed with The Mark Morris Dance Group in *The Hard Nut* and *L’Allegrò, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, Earl Mosley’s Diversity of Dance, *HopeBoykinDance* and LA-based BODYTRAFFIC. Mr. Coker joined the Company in 2019. Find him on Instagram @pcoke.

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.
ISAIAH DAY
(Chicago, IL) began his dance training in Yielded Vessel Dance Ministry at New Life Covenant Southeast. He also studied at Hubbard Street Youth Dance Center and The Chicago Academy for the Arts. He is currently a fourth-year student at The Juilliard School, under the direction of Alicia Graf Mack, and will graduate in 2024. Mr. Day has performed works by Jamar Roberts, Tiler Peck, Justin Peck, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Rena Butler, and Ohad Naharin while at The Juilliard School. In 2019, he was named a YoungArts winner in Modern/Contemporary dance. Mr. Day joined the Company in 2023.

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 Shelver, 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

CORAL DOLPHIN
(Los Angeles, CA) studied modern, West African, Flamenco, ballet, hip hop, tap, aerial silk, salsa, and acting under the mentorship of Debbie Allen. Ms. Dolphin began her professional career in NY as a founding member of Ballet Hispanico Dos. She later spent four years with Ronald K. Brown/Evidence. She has worked with artists Madonna, Janet Jackson, Beyoncé, Cardi B, and more. In 2019, she performed the Dream Ballet solo in the Broadway musical Oklahoma! She has choreographed for Miguel, Lauren Jauregui, Kali Uchis, and Lenny Kravitz, and for international brands such as Citibank and i-D. In 2020, Ms. Day made her directorial debut with a short film in collaboration with acclaimed composer Raven Bush. She seeks to amplify universal truths, in hopes that her art ignites the remembrance of the internal freedom of greater consciousness that awaits us all. But first, LOVE. Ms. Dolphin joined the Company in 2023.

SOLOMON DUMAS
(Chicago, IL) was introduced to dance through AlieyCamp. He later began his formal training at The Chicago Academy for the Arts and the Russell Talbert 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 Ailey II and joined the Company in 2016. Instagram: @solemn_on
WHO’S WHO IN 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.

JAMES GILMER
(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 performed in Twyla Now, New York City Center’s celebration of choreographer Twyla Tharp. Mr. Gilmer joined the Company in 2019. Instagram: @james.agilmer

JAU’MAIR GARLAND
(Pittsburgh, PA) began his dance training at a small studio in Pittsburgh before attending his alma mater, Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts 6-12, in eighth grade. While attending CAPA, he joined Reed Dance II under the direction of Greer Reed, and simultaneously refined his technique at Ballet Academy of Pittsburgh under the direction of Steven and Lindsay Piper. In 2020, Mr. Garland was named a National YoungArts winner in Modern/Contemporary. He is a current student at the USC Glorya Kaufman School of Dance, where he will graduate in 2024. Mr. Garland wishes to thank all of his teachers and mentors who have aided in his artistic journey. This is his first season with the Company.

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 Copley. He then studied as a scholarship student at The Ailey School and was a member of Ailey 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, and 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.
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

MICHAEL JACKSON, JR.

ASHLEY KAYLYNN GREEN
(Charleston, SC) began her training at Columbia City Jazz 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, Pennsylvania, under the direction of Garfield Lemonius. There, she performed works by Peter Chu, Aszure Barton, Kyle Abraham, and Darrell Grand Moultrie. After graduation she joined Whim W’Him Seattle Contemporary Dance where she received a Princess Grace Award in Dance. Ms. Green joined the Company in 2021 and that year was named one of “25 to Watch” by Dance Magazine.

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 Ailey/Fordham 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 Ailey II and joined the Company in 2014.

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
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. Instagram: @yannicklebrun

XAVIER MACK

(Washington, D.C.) began his dance training at Divine Dance Institute in Capitol Heights, Maryland. He received his B.A. in Modern Language & Linguistics from the University of Maryland-Baltimore County (UMBC). In 2017, Mr. Mack joined Dallas Black Dance Theatre where he performed works by Hope Boykin, Norbert De La Cruz III, Dianne McIntyre, and Matthew Rushing. Mr. Mack joined the Company in 2022.

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. 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 is the 2022 Willie Ninja Supreme Award Recipient and star of HBO Max’s Legendary. He has also incorporated his passion for the arts with social responsibility as the co-artistic director of Indiana’s South Shore Dance Alliance. He was a member of Ailey II and joined the Company in 2011. Facebook: @Maurice Gardner. Instagram: @mauricerenaldo

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 in 2017 with a BFA in Dance from Point Park University where she worked with choreographers Troy Powell, Garfield Lemonius, and Debbie Allen. After completing one year of apprenticeship, Ms. Mitchell joined Aliley II in 2017 where she performed works choreographed by Uris Sands, Bradley Shelver, Troy Powell, Robert Battle, Darrell Grand Moutrie, and Amy Hall Garner. Ms. Mitchell joined the Company in 2019. Instagram: @_slimrin_

**ALISHA RENA PEEK**

(Upper Marlboro, MD), a graduate of the Aliley/Fordham BFA Program and former member of Aliley II, began her formal dance training at the Washington School of Ballet. Ms. Peek attended Kirov Ballet Academy, participated in the Dance Theatre of Harlem Kennedy Center Residency, and studied at The Art of Technique. Professionally, Ms. Peek has had the opportunity to work with influential choreographers such as Robert Battle, Hope Boykin, Andrea Miller, Darrell Grand Moutrie, Kirven Douthis-Boy, Juel D. Lane, and others. She has taught at The Ailey School and various studios in the Maryland/Virginia area. Recently, she served as an assistant to Milton Myers and personal assistant to Hope Boykin. She participated in the HopeBoykinDance Bubble Residency and performed in An Evening of Hope and Moments by Hope. Ms. Peek has appeared in the FX hit series POSE and choreographed a short film produced by Beats by Dre.

**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 Aliley’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 a member of Aliley 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 Aliley family and legacy. Instagram: @mirandaming4
WHO’S WHO IN THE COMPANY

HANNAH ALISSA RICHARDSON
(Toronto, Ontario Canada) graduated with honors from The Ailey School Certificate Program. Ms. Richardson has performed works by choreographers including Ray Mercer, Bradley Shelver, Kirven Douthit-Boyd, Earl Mosley, William Forsythe, and Robert Battle. She has been a featured dancer in festivals including Jacob’s Pillow and the Holland Dance Festival, and had the honor of performing the world premiere of Grace and Mercy choreographed by Ronald K. Brown at Bard’s SummerScape festival. Some of her film and television credits include Orion Pictures’ Every Day and Disney Channel’s Backstage. Ms. Richardson was a proud member of Ailey II for one season before joining the Company in 2022. She is also a guest artist with Ronald K. Brown’s Evidence, A Dance Company. Ms. Richardson is thrilled to be part of Ailey and is grateful for all those who’ve continued to support her along her journey. Instagram: @hannahxrichardson

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 Ailey’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. kanjisegawa.com.

DEIDRE ROGAN
(Fort Myers, FL) began her dance training in Fort Myers, Florida under Melinda Roy, Roberto Munoz, and Cheryl Copeland. Deidre graduated with honors from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in Dance in 2015. She is a YoungArts scholarship winner, performed as a United States Arts Ambassador for President Barack Obama during the Opening Ceremony of the Hannover Messe, and was the Associate Choreographer under Choreographer Hope Boykin for City Center Encores Off-Center production of Promenade in 2019. Deidre danced with Ailey II from 2014-16 and with Parsons Dance from 2016-22. This is Deidre’s first season with the Company.

HANNAH ALISSA RICHARDSON
DEIDRE ROGAN

CONSTANCE STAMATIOU
(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 as 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
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 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 Ailey II and joined the Company in 2018. www.christopherrwilson.com. Instagram: @christopher.r.wilson

JERMAINE TERRY
(Washington, D.C.) began dancing at James Dance Center in Kissimmee, Florida. He graduated cum laude with a BFA from the University of South Florida, where he received scholarships for excellence in performance and choreography, and the Distinguished Alumnus Award for outstanding service to the arts. Mr. Terry has performed with Ailey II, 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, San Francisco Ballet, Ailey II, and PHILADANCO! among others, and was nominated for a NY Emmy for his collaboration with The Black Iris Project, WILD: Bird of Paradise. His evening wear designs have appeared online in Vogue and Essence and have been photographed by the late Bill Cunningham for the style section of The New York Times. Mr. Terry joined the Company in 2010. Instagram: @jerms83.

DE’ANTHONY VAUGHAN
(Kansas City, MO) was introduced to dance at the age of three by his grandmother. He received his training from AileyCamp, Kansas City Friends of Alvin Alley, and Kansas City Ballet School. He continued his training in New York City at The Ailey School as a scholarship student. In 2014 Mr. Vaughan joined Dallas Black Dance Theatre and has performed works by Matthew Rushing, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Kirven Douthit-Boyd, Alvin Alley, Elisa Monte, Donald McKayle, and many more. This is Mr. Vaughan’s first season with the Company. Instagram: @leedeevaughan

CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR
(Newark, NJ) is a graduate of Arts High School and his dance education began at age 11 in AileyCamp, a six-week full scholarship summer program offered to students in 10 cities nationwide. He continued training in The Ailey School’s Junior Division and later on scholarship in the Professional Division. Mr. Taylor has performed at the Apollo Theater, Lincoln Center, in Ailey’s New York galas, and was a member of Ailey II for two seasons. This is his first season with the Company.

ISABEL WALLACE GREEN
(Houston, TX) began her dance training at Houston Ballet Academy. She graduated summa cum laude from The Ailey/Fordham BFA Program with a degree in Dance and African/African American Studies. She has performed with New Chamber Ballet, Urban Souls Dance Company, and was an ensemble member of The Radio City Christmas Spectacular. Ms. Wallace-Green partnered with University of Houston and Texas Southern University art museums to premiere her first solo show titled Resilience. She danced with DBDT: Encore before becoming a company member with Dallas Black Dance Theatre. Ms. Wallace-Green joined the Company in 2023.
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, Aliley 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 AileyCamp program.

1991 – AileyCamp 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 Ailey 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 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.
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 Il 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, socials 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.
AILEY MILESTONES

2018 - Aliley believes the transformative power of dance is applicable for all ages and developed the AlileyDance 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 Aliley Athletic Boys Dance program, which are being distributed to schools nationwide beginning in the fall of 2018.

The Aliley organization honors Mr. Aliley’s pioneering legacy with a 60th Anniversary celebration titled Aliley Ascending. The celebration consists of an international tour, a Choreography Unlocked festival of performance, conversation 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 Aliley 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 Aliley Spirit Gala launched The Aliley 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 Aliley’s Revelations in the 93rd Annual Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Acclaimed company member Jamar Roberts is named Alvin Aliley 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 Aliley 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 Aliley 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 Aliley 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 Aliley All Access in March 2020, Aliley has reached over 46 million people in 121 countries globally with free streaming of full-length ballets from the Alvin Aliley American Dance Theater and Aliley II repertory for the first time, along with classes, conversations and original short films created by the Aliley dancers. Aliley 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 Aliley artists on their “Best Of” lists for dance films created during the pandemic.
**2020** – Aliley’s first virtual season, *Aliley 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 Aliley’s classic Revelations.

**2021** – Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater marks the 50th anniversary of Alvin Ailey’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 Ailey is told through Aliley’s own words, along with interviews with those close to him, and featured evocative archival footage and rarely seen historic performances. In early 2022, the national television broadcast premiere of the acclaimed documentary opened the 36th season of *PBS American Masters.*

Internationally renowned performer, choreographer, director and multidisciplinary artist Francesca Harper is appointed Aliley II Artistic Director, alongside Rehearsal Director Lakey Evans-Peña. Ms. Harper’s personal connections with Aliley are deeply rooted, as she received training at The Aliley 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 Ailey.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater participated in Lincoln Center’s first annual BAAND Together Dance Festival August 17-21, a celebration of dance that joined together New York City’s iconic dance companies Ballet Hispánico, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet, and Dance Theatre of Harlem, to share the spotlight and stage for the first time.

The Aliley Organization celebrated Artistic Director Robert Battle’s 10th anniversary leading the company forward. Robert Battle was honored with the prestigious *2021 Dance Magazine Award,* lauded by the magazine that “During Battle’s tenure, the Aliley brand 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 Aliley company, 60-plus-years on, to continue evolving, flourishing and growing ever more popular.”

September marked the launch of “Champion Tears,” a dynamic clothing collaboration between Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, artist and creative director of Denim Tears, Tremaine Emory, and the iconic Global sportswear brand, Champion. Influenced by Alvin Ailey who used the power of dance as a weapon for social change, Emory developed unique pieces within the collection to spotlight and celebrate Aliley.

**2022** – For the first time, the Aliley organization presented *Aliley Moves NYC!*, a summer celebration of free outdoor performances, dance classes, and documentary screenings throughout all five boroughs, July 23-August 1, 2022. Featuring Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Aliley II, Aliley Extension, and Aliley Arts In Education programs, the festival delivered dance back to people of all ages across New York City, the cultural capital of the world.
ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER & ROBERT BATTLE

“...the company continues to forge ahead with new repertoire that shows artistic director Robert Battle is not just building on the past but leading toward the future.”
  The Boston Globe, Karen Campbell – May 5, 2023

“... Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, one of the most important cultural institutions in the world.”
  Hollywood Soapbox, John Soltes – December 18, 2022

“Brilliant Artistic Director. It was phenomenal, the dancers, everybody, the performances. It was electrifying. This was one of the bucket list moments of my life... please go celebrate and see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Phenomenal. Phenomenal.”
  Tamron Hall Show, Tamron Hall – December 1, 2022

“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 Ailey but modern dance feel more accessible for all of us... During Battle’s tenure, the Ailey brand 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 Ailey company, 60-plus-years on, to continue evolving, flourishing and growing ever more popular.”

“... 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

“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 Ailey’s soaring delights.”
  The New York Times, Zadie Smith – April 8, 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 MacMillian – March 7, 2019

“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

THE REPERTORY

Are You in Your Feelings? (Kyle Abraham)

“Kyle Abraham knows how to make a playlist... unfurls to an R&B, soul and hip-hop compilation of thoroughly danceable songs about love and relationships. ... I can imagine happily returning to see it again and again. The dancing commands attention right away...”
  The New York Times, Siobhan Burke – December 6, 2022
“Abraham is one of the most important and influential choreographers working today, and this most recent work, his third created for the company, is a bona fide hit. It’s a feel-good charmer laced with threads of social commentary and lots of heart, and the 12 dancers in Thursday night’s performance embraced it like they were born to it. Scored to a mixtape of mostly soul, R&B, and hip-hop, “Are You in Your Feelings?” presents a vivid snapshot of Black culture and community, especially the fluctuations of group dynamics and romantic entanglements.”

_The Boston Globe_, Karen Campbell – May 5, 2023

“... features a breakout performance by Ashley Kaylynn Green, grooves playfully and sensually to contemporary songs about relationships. It’s easy to love...”

_The New Yorker_, Brian Seibert – December 26, 2022

“...set to a mixtape of “soul, neo-soul, hip-hop and R&B. ... fluent choreography ... is especially compelling. Its vivid colors, pointed emotions and consistent energy tell of familiar feelings with unforgettable impact.”


**BUSK (Aszure Barton)**

“...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...”


**Cry (Alvin Ailey)**

“Cry,” a solo originally created for the formidable Judith Jamison in 1971, in which Ailey powerfully portrays the struggles, the dignity, and the strength of African American women.”

_The New Yorker_, Marina Harss – December 20, 2021

“In three sections, Cry explores physical hardship, emotional suffering and — to the Voices of East Harlem’s “Right On Be Free” — boundless joy. Structurally, it builds to an emphatic release...”


“...emotional and spiritual transcendence...”


**Dancing Spirit (Ronald K. Brown)**

“is a perfect showcase for the Company’s strengths—virtuosic technique, fierce grace and a bottomless supply of soul.”

_Observer_, Caedra Scott-Flaherty – June 13, 2023

“...complex movement patterns distinguished by an elegant diasporic blend of traditional West African dance’s full-bodied articulations and modern dance’s spiraling turns, fluid arabesques, and gently defined lines. The combination gives “Dancing Spirit” an air of solemnity and reverence for the human spirit. The audience was so moved that when the piece ended, they leapt to their feet, filling the theater with thunderous applause.”

_Amsterdam News_, Zita Allen – June 15, 2023

“Ronald K. Brown’s Dancing Spirit (2009) was a tribute to former Ailey director and legendary dancer Judith Jamison. The central figure of the work is a Judith Jamison doppelganger (in this performance, the gorgeous Constance Stamatiou) who seems to float above all the action and performs some very Judith Jamison moves. But the whole ballet is a slow-burning crescendo... _Dancing Spirit is a keeper._”

_BachTrack_, Ivy Lin – June 8, 2023

**Duet (Paul Taylor)**

“... the sometimes off-kilter and occasionally knotty choreography intriguingly suggests a complicated love affair.”


**In a Sentimental Mood (Jamar Roberts)**

“Here Roberts explores a genre that is new to him, the mini-dance drama. The piece could almost be a short film, and film noir is its clear point of reference... _The dance is stylish and taut..._”

_Fjord Review_, Marina Harss – December 3, 2022

“looks at love and loss... It’s overtly cinematic, with a clear message that love is messy, a point that Roberts underscores with a quote by James Baldwin in the program: “Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up.””


“Roberts also continues his relationship with jazz music, beginning the work with “There’s Something About an Old Love,” a Duke Ellington composition. Its crackling, lo-fi recording sets the ambience; _like the sometimes ominous music, the dance speaks to a darker, more complicated side of love as it also evokes a bygone era..._ The music — four jazz standards reimagined by the composer Rafiq Bhatia — sets the stage for a dream ballet that sometimes feels like a nightmare... “

Memoria (Alvin Ailey)
“...a serious stage drama, with mystery and poetry.”

Night Creature (Alvin Ailey)
““Night Creature” (1741, to Duke Ellington) is an old friend, it always takes me by surprise when it introduces Cuban hip motion – a joy, since the Aliley dancers are masters in the powerfully lateral use of the pelvis, now moving in figures-of-eight, now in snakier undulations... As you'd hope, the Aliley dancers look wholly at home in every part.”
The New York Times, Alastair Macaulay – December 13, 2018

Pas De Duke (Alvin Ailey)
“...one of those special dances that lives in new ways with each new set of performers.”
The New York Times

“...the teasingly competitive duet with solos was originally made in 1976 for statuesque Ailey dancer Judith Jamison and short-statured ballet superstar Mikhail Baryshnikov, ... with Constance Stamatiou, who is petite, and Yannick Lebrun, who is tall and lean, the tables got turned. Ms. Stamatiou played the sassy sidekick, while Mr. Lebrun embodied his ballet/jazz moves with the limber kicks and arrow-sharp leaps of a fleet modern dancer.”

Revelations (Alvin Ailey)
“...one of the most celebrated and enduring works of American dance.”
The New York Times, Brian Schaefer – December 2, 2022

“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.”
Oprah Winfrey to Entertainment Tonight [on attending Ailey’s 50th Anniversary Gala] – December 3, 2008

“...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 ..., “You’re about to go to church.””
San Francisco Chronicle, Rachel Howard – March 31, 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 Aliley 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.”

“... 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...”
**WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AILEY**

**The River** (Alvin Ailey)
“...Ailey at his best, a piece ambitiously structured and wonderfully dynamic... The company shines.”
The Times, Debra Craine – September 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.”

**Roy’s Joys** (Twyla Tharp)
“...smoothly flowing choreography exudes a delicate blues tone. Although essentially a playfully evolving ensemble work, Tharp’s dancemaking, full of her familiar quirks—here acrobatic, there feisty, elsewhere sleekly nonchalant—offers the performers individual, featured moments.”
The Wall Street Journal, Robert Greskovic – December 13, 2022

“combining virtuosic ballet moves with 1940s stylings, insouciance and humor. That’s good fun... Virtuosic is right up the Ailey alley...”
The New York Times, Brian Seibert – December 13, 2022

**THE DANCERS**

“Ailey artists are known throughout the industry for their tremendous physical shape and ability.”
The Washington Post, Sarah L. Kaufman – February 3, 2022

“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

“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.”

“... Harris has emerged as a quietly confident, eminently capable star among the company’s current roster, a dancer of transfixing technical ability and ever-deepening expressive range. She is as grounded as she is electrifying ...”
The New York Times, Siobhan Burke – December 9, 2022 (Jacquelin Harris profile)

“But James Gilmer and Jacquelin Harris had a head start. having appeared in Tharp’s last two seasons at City Center. Their duet in “Roy’s Joys” is true romance. Truly. it’s hard to take your eyes off Harris — in “Roy’s Joys” or any other work she appears in. Over the past few years, she has blossomed, taking on challenges outside of the Ailey repertory with seeming effortlessness. She never shows off. She just dances cleanly, directly, fearlessly, often with a genuine smile. The joys of Ailey’s Tharp revival aren’t so much Roy’s as Harris’s — and whenever she’s onstage, ours.”
The New York Times, Brian Seibert – December 13, 2022

“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.”
The New York Times, Gia Kourlas – December 28, 2019

“... Khalia Campbell was a goddess with an umbrella in the same number as well as a star of the finale.”
Fjord Review, Faye Arthurs – December 16, 2022 (in reference to Revelations)

“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.”
The New York Times, Gia Kourlas – December 13, 2021

“... Ashley Kaylynn Green — a powerhouse who joined the company just last year...”
The New York Times, Siobhan Burke – December 6, 2022 (in reference to Are You in Your Feelings?)

“Christopher Taylor, threw himself joyfully into the processional to “Wade in the Water,” “Sinner Man,” and “Rocka My Soul.” He seemed to be truly living. The company is in particularly fine form these days.”
Fjord Review, Marina Harss – December 3, 2022 (in reference to Revelations)
**BROADCAST HIGHLIGHTS 2023 SEASON**

**LIVE with Kelly & Ryan:**
Ailey's Dancers Perform Revelations

**CBS NY:** Celebrating Ronald K. Brown's Dancing Spirit, center of Ailey's Brooklyn Run

**Toronto CTV:** Where Hannah Richardson's pro dreams began

**PBS One on One with Steve Adubato:**
Empowering Social Justice Through the Arts

**SHERRI:** Mambo Dance Workout with Ailey Extension

**CBS NY:** Ailey's season returns, with Bronx dancer Khalia Campbell in featured role

**CBS Boston:** Alvin Ailey dancers give free community workshop before Boston shows

**Tamron Hall Show:** Judith Jamison Says AILEY Doc Gives “Intimate Look” at Ailey’s Life

**Toronto CTV:** Where Hannah Richardson's pro dreams began

**CBS NY:** Ailey's season returns, with Bronx dancer Khalia Campbell in featured role

**Sherry:** Mambo Dance Workout with Ailey Extension

**CBS News Hour:** How Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater balances history and innovation

**ABC’s Good Morning America 3rd Hour:**
Robert Battle discusses “Ailey” documentary

**TED Talk:** “Revelations from a Lifetime in Dance” with Judith Jamison and excerpts of Ailey's classic works Cry and Revelations

*(Click on thumbnail images for full videos)*

**Radio Highlights**

*NPR’s All Things Considered,* “Alvin Ailey’s dance company marks 65 years”

*WNYC’s All Of It with Alison Stewart,* “Ailey at City Center: Robert Battle and Kyle Abraham discuss the Company’s performances”
DANCE REVIEW: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s annual return pairs ‘Revelations’ with visions for the future

By: Karen Campbell
May 6, 2023 (Online: 5/5/23)

Alvin Ailey troupe pairs ‘Revelations’ with new works

By Karen Campbell

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s annual Boston visit has become a treasured cultural tradition, bringing with it dynamic dance and a whirlwind of spring. Each program’s inclusion of Ailey’s stirring “Revelations” is a reminder of the choreographer’s humanity and groundbreaking legacy. Fuelled by spirituals, the 1960 creation has been seen by more audiences around the world than any other modern dance work, yet it retains a heartfelt power that never gets old.

However, the company continues to forge ahead with new repertoire that shows artistic director Robert Battle is not just building on the past but leading toward the future. Thursday night’s opening program, presented by Celebrity Series of Boston at the Wang Theatre, also featured two new works created for the Alley company by Kyle Abraham and Jamar Roberts.

Abraham’s “Are You in Your Feelings?” is a major new addition to the Alley repertoire. Abraham is one of the most important and influential choreographers working today, and this most recent work, his third created for the company, is a bona fide hit. It’s a feel-good charmer laced with threads of social commentary and lots of heart, and the 12 dancers in Thursday night’s performance embraced it like they were born to it. Scored to a mixtape of mostly soul, R&B, and hip-hop, “Are You in Your Feelings?” presents a vivid snapshot of Black culture and community, especially the fluctuations of group dynamics and romantic entanglements. Ousting chatter and voice-overs provide some context to the good-natured posturing and flirtations camaraderie — and a frisson of sexual tension. Rolling shoulders, swiveling hips, and slinkiness carouse ride atop quicksilver footwork. Breathy screeches, the audience is invited to revel in the spirit of the moment.

Photos by Robert Torres

DANCE REVIEW

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER
Presented by Celebrity Series of Boston, At Boch Center Wang Theatre, Thursday (repeats through Sunday). Tickets start at $35, 800-653-8000, bochcenter.org

Roberts, who danced with the company from 2002 to 2021 and was also its resident choreographer for three years, has created a dramatic, intimate portrait of a couple that is both tender and fraught. Seemingly recalling love and loss through hazy shifts of memory, it is full of connections made and broken, agitated reaches and deep hovers, with mercenary shifts of weight and direction. The fluctuation of music, from Duke Ellington to abstract electronic murmurings by Rafael Bhatta, adds to the sense of fragmentation. But toward the end, there is a satisfying segment in which the two find themselves in unison. Bathed in red light, they find cohesion not in dancing with one another, but in moving side by side.

Paul Taylor’s 1994 “Dust” offered a very different take on the male/female duet, its stock and trade clean shapes and long classical lines. Set to the music of Franz Josef Haydn and graciously danced by Belen Pererea and Patrick Coker, it was gentled and sweet, with endearing traces of humor — a hop skip here, a swoon and drag there; two arms connecting to form the shape of a heart. A soaring lift takes flight one moment, the next Pererea drapes her body around Coker like a cape, her feet resting atop his as they walk together as one.

Karen Campbell can be reached at karenccampbell@boston.com.
Review: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is back at the Auditorium, timely and timeless

By: Lauren Warnecke
March 9, 2023 (Online: 3/7/23)

A palpable buzz overtook the Auditorium Theatre Wednesday, with a who’s who from the Chicago arts world arriving dressed to the nines for the 130-year-old venue's annual gala.

It so happened this was also the opening night performance of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's annual pilgrimage to Chicago, a tradition that stems back 55 years.

Chicago is woven into the fabric of this New York-based company, with several dancers calling the Windy City home and the Auditorium as a habitual tour stop every year — every year but one, of course: 2021 was canceled due to the pandemic.

Continuing through Sunday in three different programs, the company presents classic works from the company's past, folding in new-to-the-repertoire from late founder Alvin Ailey's peers and some of the leading voices in contemporary dance today.

A few highlights include a revival of Tyrone Perry's "Boy's Joys" which Aliley adopted into its rep this season, performed Thursday and Saturday; Sunday boasts an all-Ailey program, while Friday's bill includes new works by Kyle Abraham and outgoing resident choreographer Janice Roberts, plus a new-to-broad-cast Aliley and resident choreographer Kyle Abraham's "Duet." Wednesday's early evening show featured just three pieces, but in that brief, 90-minute morsel, Ailey once again proved its timelessness and timeliness.

The night opened with Abraham's latest work, "Are You in Your Feelings?" Created in 2022 especially for the Ailey company, Abraham employs a time-bending playlist spanning the catalogs of luminary Black artists. Tracks are tightly pieced together, not appearing to play in any particular order, with The Flamingos' "I Only Have Eyes for You" on one end of the timeline and Summer Walker and Kendrick Lamar on the other.

In the middle: saucy sounds of the '60s and early '70s and a surface with bits from Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu and Drake.
Dance

It sounds wholly disclaiming, but “Are You in Your Feelings?” is a slow and largely understated barn. Big pops of color in Karen Young’s costumes, made (naked under Dan Scaletti’s lighting, give a theatrical trumpet to a piece that, by turns, feels nonchalant—epic.

To this, Abraham prescribes a bedazzlement of pedestrian gestures and classical ballet steps, with a base of slyly smooth undulations that are more quintessential than. These perorations occasionally sizzle in satisfying ways, but the tone is decid-

edly internal—it’s a groove that doesn’t aim to wear.

Yet, wow it does in a few remarkable moments: The piece opens and closes with dancers Ashley Kaylynn Green and Chavire Montesino matched up. They playfully poke and prod at each other with gentle shrugs to a shoulder or leg, moving the pas de deux along. Green forms the central character here, in what Abraham describes as “a celebration of Black culture, Black music and the youthful spirit that perseveres...in us all.” Literal bits of the culture creep in, with references to hand jive and voguing. For example. That “Are You in Your Feelings?” throws Il-side ballet steps into the mix—really, Kylie, gugenollades!!—is perhaps his reminder that Black culture is not and never has been a universal experience.

After remarks from Audition/CEO Rich Rehns and Alley artistic director Robert Battle, Jacqueline Harris and Karol Segura performed Battle’s bite-sized 2007 duet, “Unfold.” In his comments, Battle described the first time he heard Leontyne Price, the first African American opera singer to rise to international acclaim. “Unroll” is appropriately reinterpreted. Harris and Segura counter their sinewy frames almost as if undergoing an exorcism. But this passion is tempered by tender moments for the couple: it’s a lot packed into a very small space interpreting Custer Charpenter’s famous aria from “Louise.”

This expedited performance (others throughout the weekend will be closer to two hours in length) ended, as all do, with Alley’s iconic masterwork, “Revelations.”

In a way, “Revelations” is the 1960 vintage edition of Abraham’s “Are You in Your Feelings”? A mixtape of era-relevant gospel hymns, Alley sought to represent Black culture and Black life through expressions of joy and hope. For the dancers, it is a convention of their daily lives as routine as brushing their teeth. In his 25 years in the company, Chicago native

Jacob Gilmour has performed this piece thousands of times. All other times didn’t matter when he laid down at center stage, alone, in white pants and top for “I Want to Be Ready,” “Revelations” unapologetically difficult display of technique and individual strength. If Gilmour’s not tired of this piece yet, neither am I.

Lauren Warneke is a freelance critic.

When: Through March 12
Where: Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Ida B. Wells Drive
Running time: 2 hours
Tickets: $63-$133 at 312-347-2300
and audtoriumtheatre.org
Alvin Ailey Troupe Always a Revelation
By: Rachel Howard
April 13, 2023 (Online: 4/12/23)

Alvin Ailey troupe always a revelation

Dance programs in Berkeley showcase unbounded brilliance

By Rachel Howard

It's that time of year when Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's annual visit to Cal Performances shakes us awake.

And with the National Medal of Arts recently bestowed upon the International Association of Blacks in Dance, it's an apt time to reflect on the ways Black companies have historically been pigeonholed in the U.S. by non-Black writers, who not that long ago still lumped darker-skinned choreographers and performers into one genre, “Black dance.” It's also worth remembering that, in the decades after Alvin Ailey's early death in 1989, critics (including this one) too often tried to narrow his troupe's future, asking what Ailey should be, and what it should dance.

What ridiculously limiting questions. On Tuesday, April 11, at Zellerbach Hall, the virtuosic opening night of Ailey Week answered them firmly and thrillingly. The Ailey company is a collection of extraordinarily versatile movement artists who can dance pretty much anything.

The only disappointment of this visit — the New York-based troupe's 53rd since its first tour to UC Berkeley in 1968 — might be the impossibility of picking only one program to catch. Over six days and seven performances through Sunday, April 16,

Ailey is offering three distinct esizes, each of them tantalizing.

But I wouldn't trade anything for the sheer luxury and delight of seeing the company in Twyla Tharps'
AILEY
From page B7
earlier work with Tharp for the 2021 program “Twylla Now.” But the whole cast of nine shape-shifts between shrugging playfulness and supersonic control with a Tharpian fluidity one hopes would make the famously perfectionist choreographer happy.

What an inspired idea to bring back this unpretentious masterpiece, which premiered in 1997 by Tharp’s own troupe but never danced again until Ailey took it up last year.

Costume designer Santo Loquasto’s brown trousers and tank tops are simple, the better to keep focus on Tharp’s compositional brilliance. Gilmer and Solomon Dumas have a funny, friendly chest-butt court showdown, Jacqueline Harris gets hoisted by two men in tricky partnering until a sudden death drop has the audience gasping. It all builds to a sigh-inducing duet between Gilmer and Harris that spills over into the interstitial silence. (One of the most slyly pleasing things about “Roy’s Joy” is the way that Tharp, like the best jazz musicians, extends her phrasings over musical bar lines and silences.)

The middle section of Program A moves briskly with two works the company also brought to Berkeley last year in its tribute to current Artistic Director Robert Battle. “Unfold,” to an aria by the late 19th century French composer Gustave Charpentier (as delivered by the surreal vibrato of Leontyne Price) opens and closes with Ashley Mayeux in a deep, incredibly held backbend, as Jeroboam Bozeman trembles, clutches and slides her across the floor. “For Four,” also in Program C, highlights Ashley Kay-lynn Green at the center of a riffing and sometimes raucous quartet in black suspenders and tuxedo jackets to a drum-fill-laden recording of Wynton Marsalis.

Of course, Program A closed with Ailey’s eternally stirring suite of spirituals, 1960s “Revelations,” with Christopher R. Wilson, Jas'mine Gar-land and Patrick Coker delivering a notably fiery “Sinner Man.” Compact of frame but dancing big, Coker particularly had the rapid-pirouettions-into-full-layback part down, and he caught some time-bending balances.

But while “Revelations” almost always closes Ailey programs, on this run’s Program B, Kyle Abraham’s pop-fueled New York season hit, “Are You in Your Feelings?” will replace “Revelations.” That program also features the West Coast premiere of “Duet,” a 1964 work by Paul Taylor (an irreplaceable giant of the dance world who died five years ago), proving yet again that today’s Ailey is stylistically unbound-ed.

Rachel Howard is a freelance writer.

Alvin Ailey dancer Jacqueline Harris (left), James Gilmer and Chalvar Monteiro in “Roy’s Joy’s.”
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Makes Triumphant Return to BAM for Limited Engagement
June 6, 2023

The world-renowned dance troupe will perform two programs at BAM — one featuring the seminal works of Alvin Ailey himself, and the other featuring a distinctly Brooklyn mix of rare and recent works.

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater six-day series at the Brooklyn Academy of Music is going to feel like a homecoming.

Maybe it’s because of the Brooklyn-themed program. Perhaps it’s because BAM is where Ailey first performed as a dancer in 1956, two years before he founded his paradigm-shifting dance company.

It might be because some of the past and current dancers grew up here. Or, maybe it’s that Brooklyn and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater are both rooted in culture, creativity and kinetic energy.

Regardless of the reason, the series, which takes place June 6-11, is going to feel like a sacred, distinctly Brooklyn reunion.

“It’s just an overwhelming feeling, to perform with Alvin Ailey in Brooklyn,” Ailey dancer Jeroboam Bozeman, of Bed-Stuy, said. Bozeman has been performing with the company for 10 years and credits his love of dance to growing up in Brooklyn and dancing at block parties.

“There’s an underlying pressure from Brooklyn — you come home and it’s like, ‘All right now, you better show us!’ you know? So that’s a little bit how I feel, but I am just so excited.”

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is an iconic institution in the world of modern dance, known for its performances that transcend cultural boundaries, tell stories and provoke profound reflections on identity and social issues. The company was started in 1958 in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement and quickly gained international acclaim for its piece, “Revelations,” which explores African American cultural heritage and spirituality.

Ailey dancer Jacquelin Harris said during the upcoming performances at BAM, she wants the audience to absorb the hope, unity and resilience explored on stage.

“We are giving our whole hearts and spirit and enjoying each other’s space and time, so I hope the audience takes that with them,” Harris said. She has been at Ailey for nine years.

The dance company will perform two programs at BAM. One program, called “Brooklyn Bonds,” will feature fresh takes on three rarely performed pieces by choreographers Ronald K. Brown, Twyla Tharp and Kyle Abraham. The second program, “All Ailey,” will feature four seminal works choreographed by Ailey himself.

Brooklyn Bonds

In Brooklyn Bonds, the dance troupe will perform three dances: “Dancing Spirit” by Ronald K. Brown, “Roy’s Joys” by Twyla Tharp and “Are You in Your Feelings?” by Kyle Abraham.

Brown’s “Dancing Spirit” is an homage to the intrepid Judith Jamison, the artistic director emerita of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. She’s famous for her evocative choreography, for leading the dance troupe after Ailey’s death and for debuting Ailey’s 16-minute solo, “Cry,” which is dedicated to Black mothers. In Roy’s Joys, the company showcases Tharp’s work, who is known for her
technically brilliant choreography and playful tone. The smoldering piece — set to the music of legendary New York jazz trumpeter Roy Eldridge — was created in 1997 and hasn’t premiered since then, Harris said.

“It’s about taking the music and making it new again,” Harris said.

The last piece of the “Brooklyn Bound” program, Bozeman said, is sure to be a crowd pleaser. “Are You in Your Feelings?” is a new work by Abraham that celebrates the youthful spirit of Black culture through iconic music from different decades.

“So many different people can connect to it — it’s one that the audience will really feel as though they are seeing themselves,” Bozeman said. “Every time we perform it, we have audience members singing the songs.”

“It’s very ‘For us, by us,’ very ‘For the culture.’ I’m so excited to share that with a Brooklyn audience,” Harris told BK Reader.

All Ailey

The “All Ailey” set list includes four works by the icon himself that showcase the expansive ingenuity of Ailey’s repertoire. “Night Creature,” which Ailey choreographed in 1975, is a sparkling homage to nightlife to the music of Duke Ellington. “Cry,” which he choreographed in 1971, was a birthday gift for his mother, Lula Cooper.

The intense, emotional 16-minute solo is an impressive physical feat dedicated to Black mothers. Survivors, which he choreographed in 1986 with Mary Barnett, tells the story of Nelson and Winnie Mandela, set to the jazz of Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln.

Though “Survivors” is about Apartheid South Africa, Bozeman said the ballet’s themes echo today’s social climate. “Performing ‘Survivors’ is paying homage — not only to Nelson Mandela — but to all of our ancestors who have paved the way so that we can create change,” said Bozeman, who will portray Nelson in the piece.

“When I think of different stories of police brutality and the injustice is that we, as Black and Brown people, face in the world and navigate in America, having a ballet like ‘Survivors,’ is incredibly fitting.”

Last but not least, the dance company will perform “Revelations,” the iconic work exploring grief, joy and spirituality through the African American traditions of gospel, spirituals and blues. “Revelations,” which debuted in 1960, is inspired by Ailey’s upbringing in the Baptist church.

“I grew up in the South, I grew up in the Baptist church and so for me, the first time seeing ‘Revelations’ as a young adult, it felt like it was the first time I saw my experiences, my spirituality represented on the main stage by these superhero dancers who are so gorgeous and so sexy and so impassioned doing this type of work,” Harris said.

“It feels like an honor to be able to carry on that legacy and be that representation for younger generations.” “It’s not just African American culture and history — it’s American history as well,” Bozeman said. “We are a part of this huge nucleus, this big thing that weaves life into the world and I am just grateful that I’m just a small part.”

For tickets and the performance schedule, click here.
Moving to Love’s Ups and Downs

By: Siobhan Burke

December 6, 2022 (Online: 12/4/22)

THE ETERNAL DANCE THAT IS LOVE

Ashley Kaylynn Green and Chaunce Moorsby, center, with fellow members of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, performing in the premiere of Kyle Abraham’s “Are You in Your Feelings?” at New York City Center. The piece is Abraham’s third work for the troupe. REVIEW PAGE 2
Moving to Love’s Ups and Downs

In the choreographer Kyle Abraham’s third work for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the dancers find intimacy in songs by Erykah Badu and Jasmine Sullivan.

The choreographer Kyle Abraham knew how to make a piece. His third work for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, "Are You in Your Feelings?" which had its premiere on Friday as part of the company’s annual New York City Center season, is, in an Ailey, soul and hip-hop conglomeration of thoroughly danceable songs about love and relationships.

Alone and collectively, there are songs that narrate the ups and downs of getting together and breaking up, of making commitments to oneself or being unmothered by love. (An Erykah Badu line during ‘I’ll Call U Back’: “I’m busy, so I’ll call you back.”)

The album and independent solo of Abraham’s choreography, for 12 dancers, reflect those emotional stories of, at times, parallel stories of their own.

"Are You in Your Feelings?" the centerpiece of a program that begins with Amissa Bakara’s 2010 ensemble piece "Blest" and ended with a particularly engrossing performance of Alvin Ailey’s "Revelations," arranges the needs of Abraham’s unexpectedly pleasurable "An Untold Love." (2020), an evening-length work for his own Brooklyn-based company, A.I.M. B. "Untold," with its 20-module soundtrack, is a Black love sitcom dance (as one of Abraham’s collaborators has said, "Feelings?" could be Season 2, in their theme and structure, they inhabit the same universe). While "Feelings?" doesn’t quite have the same grandeur for Abraham or for the Alvin Ailey company, I can imagine happily returning to see it again and again.

The dancing commands attention right away, as Chaturaj Montiero and Emily Pearson, an ethereal arc dips across the backdrop (Van Fisher designed the expensive lighting), and under its influence, Karen Young’s bright, attractive costumes of billowing pink and choker tops take on a fluorescent glow.

In retrospect, what followed could be a refreshing return to that initial relationship; the work ends, too, with a dust for Montero and Green, more developed, in which they seem to build trust and surrender to the joys of each other’s company, embodying the euphoria and abandon of Abraham’s "While We’re Young," when she sings, "I’ll go everywhere you go."

But a lot happens between those first and final scenes, in overlapping vignettes that often find two dancers interrogated by a third (or more), "Don’t catch feelings," Jasmine Sullivan warns in "Motor," as James Gilmer drifts away from Citita Devevo-Solomon, who has found a new partner — and who seems especially in her element throughout the work, balancing in its playfulness and groove. Same-sex duets (which also work) and dissonances. Shalee Brown’s "Woman to Woman" accompanies a dust for Devevo-Solomon and Mercedes T. Darcey. While the song has the same kind of combining, this pair uncover a closer, deeper intimacy.

In other passages, partnering gives way to the satisfying tension of a group (though at times the dancers seemed to still be getting their bearings). In Shalee’s "I’ll Call U Back," seven women, each in her own spotlight, deliver a nonsensical dance of the names, with pattering arms and swinging hands that match the best. Kendrick Lamar’s soaring "LOVE." (featuring Zacari) provides a coda in the final act, a cresendo near the end. Arranged in a triangle formation, the dancers move together — fluidly punctuated with calls like a shoulder brush or a simple waltz — but don’t make physical contact, perhaps a consideration of what it means to love oneself. A four-way for Green could be the same — and though, here, she seems to be singing, with her arm around another person, or maybe with a child, it’s a deep intimacy.

In the work’s closing moments, when she and Montero exchange a little handshake and waltz away, he’s hard to tell if it’s a love is platonic, or romantic or both. But in its extent, it’s more matter than less than the obvious. As in that for the moments, they have opened themselves to each other.
Robert Battle was around 12 years old when he first saw dancers perform a work by Alvin Ailey. "It was a revelation," he recalls. As a bullied child with artistic ambitions, he found it dazzling to see people who looked like him earn applause for telling the story of the African-American experience through movement. "I understood what was going on was deeper than entertainment," he says, "They were expressing human through the resistance, and I felt a sense of pride.

Never did Mr. Battle imagine that he would one day head Ailey’s company, the internationally acclaimed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT). "That wasn’t even on my radar," he says over video from his home in Manhattan, near the company’s midtown studios.

As he celebrates his fourth decade as AAAADT’s artistic director with a national tour that ends at New York’s Lincoln Center this month, Mr. Battle, 40, says he is finally ready to explain: "I spent a few years always waiting for the other shoe to drop, for someone to find out and go, ‘You don’t know what you’re doing,’" he admits. Although his predecessor, Judith Jamison, told Mr. Battle she handpicked him to lead AADT because of his "singular vision" he says it’s only recently that he learned to trust who’s in his head and heart: "Now I’m ready to lean in.

Mr. Battle grew up in a loving but unconventional home in Liberty City, one of the poorest parts of Miami. He never met his father, hardly knew his mother and lost his siblings to foster homes. His great aunt and uncle took him in as a baby, corrected his severely bowed legs with braces and raised him with the help of their daughter, a piano-playing, poetry-reading, autism advocate whom he calls "Mama." He learned that the bonds of family could be both strong and malleable. "Perhaps that’s why I was always looking for where I belong," he says.

Mr. Battle’s earliest ambitions as a child was to become a preacher, after he felt "something" when he heard a particularly charismatic one preach. "I thought, I want to be like that." He memorized sermons and performed them at home "for myself and my imaginary congregation." With hindsight, he sees that this was his first exposure to the power of stagecraft. "I always say it’s not so different from what I do now.

A bright child, Mr. Battle seized his real situation was running the classroom. His mom introduced him to the poetry of Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou, the music of Sarah Vaughan and Nina Simone, and the films of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. He loved them all. "But that kind of stuff got you boat up in Liberty City," he says.

He learned to tolerate being called a "nigger" and "sissy"—"These are the names I can represent," and he of ten carried a hammer to defend himself. Many of the men in his life pushed him to "toughen up," but he knew he was already tough. "I understand why I was looked at as weak, but somewhere inside me was such a determination that I could not be deterred," he says.

One of Mr. Battle’s teachers, a prematurely retired ballerina, paid for him to take ballet classes after school and on weekends starting when he was 8-10. He recalls asking if he could one day be a "real black layperson," she said, "You can be whatever you want to be.

At the New School of the Arts, a magnet high school in Miami, Mr. Battle found he performed modern dance for the way it permitted "realizing people feel something" and technical. He also cultivated mentors who "went beyond the classroom and gave me the courage to explore." He planned to stay in Miami for college, but on a whim he went to a local audition for Hubbard and the school hired him to New York by offering to cover his tuition and housing costs. "It was thrilling," he says.

Upon graduating in 1986, Mr. Battle secured a coveted spot in the Parsons Dance Company. When the troupe’s choreographer, David Parsons, noticed he was "always making things, always fiddling around with movement," he asked Mr. Battle to create a dance for the company. "It was the first time I'd done something like that, and it went very well," Mr. Battle recalls. He says he was asked when people notice that his "dances are very musical." "I want people to hear the dance and see the music," he explains. "When they choreograph, they try to let the score in on hands, like it’s a personal diary entry.

One commission led to another, and in 2001 he left Parsons to start his own company, Battleworks, which began touring internationally in 2002. Soon Mr. Battle heard he had played...
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 Ailey 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

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This Is His Ailey Now
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Dec. 19), 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 Bartenieff’s 10 years in charge with a program devoted solely to his choreography (Tuesday and Dec. 11 and 17). Such a focus on his dances is rare. When he took over as director, Bartenieff 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 Bartenieff, 49, has transformed that reputation by creating the first full-length Ailey classics and the near-silence of Alley’s signature masterpiece, “Revelations,” he has brought in works by unexpected choreographers like Paul Taylor, Ohad Naharin and Wayne McGregor. He has commissioned pieces by Kyle Abraham, the hip-hop master Rennie Harris and Ronald K. Brown, who many Aliey watchers had hoped would succeed Jarossy. In 2019, he chose Jamar Roberts, a dancer in the company, as its first resident choreographer, discovering and nurturing one of today’s most acclaimed voices.
With Bartenieff’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 a few duds and misfires, but the standard critical complaint of the Janisoo years — that the new repertory didn’t do justice to the always exceptional Aliey dancers — is now seldom heard.
“Bartenieff has been diligent in expanding the Alley legacy according to its inciting logics,” said Charles P. DeFerrante, the author of “Bringing Revelations!” and a professor of dance and African American studies at Duke University. “He has broadened 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 Janisoo think, 10 years on? “I knew Robert would have a different palate,” she said, “but he understands the tradition 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 Bartenieff’s mind. In his office, next to a desk he inherited from Alley, holding a talismanic prism that Alley owned, the man in charge spoke of second-guessing his choices, wondering “Would Alley have liked this?” He recalled how Jarossy told him to trust his own voice, and that the approach’s confidence helped his confidence. Only recently, though, has he been feeling fully comfortable in his position, ready for his 10 years.
What he is most proud of, he said, are the chances he’s taken, the swerves away from what he thought people presumed he might do. One of his best moves, for example, was importing Taylor’s “Arden Count,” a bucolic modern classic set to Baroque music, not the kind of trendy selection that might have anticipated from a new, young director making his mark.
“I see evolution and revolution differently,” he said, explaining how being raised by his great-aunt and great-uncle taught him to look at things “through an older type of wisdom that doesn’t necessarily go with the flow.” (That upbringing might also account for the down-home humor that has characterized his public speaking.)
Another example of swerving: commissioning a celebration of Alley’s life for the company’s 60th anniversary from Harris, a hip-hop choreographer, because “nobody would expect that.”
What Bartenieff appreciates in Harris, he said, is “how his mind works, and how he sees things that I don’t see.” Bartenieff recognized something similar in Rehearsal’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,” Bartenieff said. “I’ve never asked him to do anything specific. I want to pay it forward because that opportunity was given to me.”
Bartenieff was referring to when he was a member of David Parson’s company in the 1990s. “I liked making little things;” he said, and Parson “saw that and put some of it on stage.” Those works were what attracted the attention of people at Ailey, leading to commissions for the company and eventually to the directorship.
But when Bartenieff took over at Ailey, he did “not program much of his own choreography. I wanted to be looked at as a curator,” he said. And I know 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 choreography now;” 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, and that makes it more personal,” he said.
His new “For Four” — one 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 to having 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 started Aliey 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 Aliey can be part of topical political conversations. “Not because people ask us to, 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 image. I wanted 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 spokesman who is typically careful not to offend.
“This is a real generational change,” Bartenieff said. “My great-aunt was in 1963. If he was talking about a white person, it was in a hush. He was the strongest man I knew, but you didn’t talk about those things. Now the younger generation of dancers are saying that we need to talk about it and show where we stand as an organization.”
“By and by, if you think about what we do at Aliey has always been about the notion that Black lives matter.”
He cited the new documentary about Aliey by Jamila Wignot as a timely reminder. “You can sort of invert what he might have thought,” Bartenieff 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-jerk thing is to overcorrect,” 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.”
Pandemic revived Ailey dance company director’s own creativity

by Sarah L. Kaufman

When he became the artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater 10 years ago, Robert Battle stopped seeing himself as a choreographer.

“In fact,” he said in a recent phone interview, “there were parts of me that didn’t really think I would make another work.”

Paradoxically, making work is precisely why Battle had landed at Ailey in the first place in 2011. It was his skill as a choreographer and director of his own small troupe, Battleworks Dance Company, that caught the attention of one of the world’s most prestigious modern-dance organizations. Judith Jamison, Battle’s champion and predecessor at Ailey, hailed him as “the creative force of the future.”

It has taken years for Battle, 49, to muster the nerve to create again.

He made a piece for the company in 2015, but since then, leadership responsibilities crowded out the artist in him: raising money, choosing repertoire, overseeing the internationally touring company as well as its junior troupe, Ailey II, and the Ailey School. Promoting the vision of founder Alvin Ailey, who died in 1989, and expanding the Black-led, Black-centered organization he left behind. Carrying on the legacy.

There also was an inherent intimidation factor. Battle was regularly bringing in established, first-rate choreographers to create premieres. Could his own work measure up?

see battle on E7
A creative revival during a pandemic

BATTLE FROM EII

Being vulnerable and in charge at the same time—this was a headless he didn’t have time for, he remembered.

"The kind of intimacy that is needed to make work," Battle says, "to drown out everything else and make that thing—a very hard thing to find the space for that." Then the pandemic smothered everything, with Zoom and Battle’s calendar clean, and crazy as it sounds, it helped him. The shutdown provided space and, as the racial reckoning, a spark. Battle dusted off some of his older works. And for the first time in years, he created a new one.

Washington audiences will get a good look at Battle’s creative side when the Alley company returns to the Kennedy Center Feb. 4 for the first time in two years. Its offer are four programs (and Alley’s gospel-inspired spirit-lifter: "Revelations") will cap each week. They feature a slew of works by Alley, one by resident choreographer Janice Siracusa Roberts, and several Battle pieces. Two performances are specially dedicated to him: "Battle 100th Anniversary," with the dancers by the director.

To be sure, most of the Battle pieces date from his previous life. He created all but one piece for the first time ever at over at Alley, including the world premiere of a new piece, "For Four: "Fosse"" by Wynton Marsalis, it's a seven-minute tribute to female power and to Ella Fitzgerald's legacy spanning.

His new creation (to be performed opening night, among others) is called "For Four: "Fosse" a quarter of a century beyond the original "For Four" by Fosse and a modern take on what the late great dancer did. It's a collaboration with African American jazz dancer Wynton Marsalis. "It's a seven-minute, four-part homage to Ella Fitzgerald's legacy spanning.

For all that was lost during the pandemic—months of touring and revenue, time with his dancer, donor events, not to mention human companionship—Battle, who lives alone, gained something important.

In this moment of stillness, I missed being in my own company and creative self," he says.

Her dog, North, Barton in the background, like a little sheep. Battle introduces him over the phone as his personal north star, a dependable comfort, especially during the months of isolation.

"In the quiet of the steeping away because we weren’t traveling, in those moments when there’s nothing one could do, I could hear my choreographic voice against the silence. It was a way I do hear things I want to say.

So far this year, Battle has been to music, and the director saw movies in his head. Then an open

"When he got the job 10 years ago, he made the choice to listen before he came in with his agenda," says Clark, a former Alley dancer and a founding member of Battleworks, the new-dance troupe Battle ran for a decade before coming to Alley. Clark teaches Battle’s choreography throughout the Alley organization and at other educational institutions.

"I was a different person, I might have thought. Oh, great, now I have a much bigger platform for my work. But he didn’t change.

"That initial component of Blackness is in this, in being a piece of music, and also receiving information by looking at the music," says Clark. "And in the studio with the dancers, it’s listening, taking in, seeing. What do we have here?"

And that’s transferable to what he’s done as a teacher, to listen first and then move.

"I know the dancers needed this," he says. "That personalized it for me. It was less about my title, more about. This is liberating for the dancers."

That title. Nice, for sure, but it can get in the way. "As a director, you have to be in front," he says. "To make work that is successful, to feel that so much rides on that when you’re in front—often I would just say, ‘Oh, leave it to the professionals!’ He laughs.

Allowing other artists to create works, and watching them in the studio, he says, "is rewarding, too. I could be on the wall with so many choreographers I know and admire. He names some from whom he has commissioned works over the years. Renée Harris, Ronald K. Brown, Anika Horton. They’re all influential. ‘For Four,’ including Alley himself.

"I didn’t do that intentionally," Battle says. "It’s sort of poured out of me, and I didn’t stop it. That allowed me to rediscover my own voice as opposed to who I’m expected to be."

But if performing to expectations weighs on him—keeping Alley in sight, maintaining the legacy—then that also distinguishes him as a director, says Elisa Clark, Battle’s long-time assistant. She points to his tendency to study other and proceed thoughtfully, then turn to shining the spotlight on himself.

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ABOVE: Robert Battle, the artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, at the Alley Studios in Manhattan in January.

BELOW: From left, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s Solomon Dumas, Samantha Figgins, Robert Dumas, Sofia Perry and Renaldo Maurice in Battle’s “For Four.”

White police officers were acquitted in the beating death of a Black insurance agent. They recovered in subsequent years. Amid fires and violence, police closed off the area.

Battle remembers seeing a local fire company in flames, and can still smell the burning rubber. And he has a vivid recollection of his ballet teacher, Adelina Murzea, coming to his house despite the chaos to haul him to a lesson. She had taken an interest in him, paid for his classes and regularly drove him there.

"I would pick him up one day, and she’d be the police barricade," Battle says. "She’d pick him up, and there’s my student has to go to class! And then she’d think through. She arrived at the door, to the surprise of everyone, ‘You have to go to class,’ she’d tell him. "He laughed, long and hard. "There’s something powerful in that. You go on. No matter what anybody says.

That spirit is in his new piece. After the dancer in ‘For Four’ falls to the ground, he gets up and walks offstage. But it’s an ordinary walk.

"He does this thing we call tipping, with a lot of attitude, walking on the ball of your foot as if you’re in high boots. "It’s the notion that despite all that," says the choreographer, "you’re still tipping."
Alvin Ailey dance company to host free events in all 5 boroughs for 10 days

By: Karu F. Daniels
July 23, 2022 (Online: 7/22/22)

The heat is on in New York, but Alvin Alley American Dance Theater is giving New Yorkers plenty of reason to get outside.

The iconic dance company is beginning a series of free events throughout the city from Saturday through Aug. 1. Called Alley Moves NYC, the 10-day summer celebration will include performances by the company, classes, workshops and screenings of Jamila Wignot's acclaimed 2021 documentary "Alley.

"New York City and its people have been an inspiration for Alley artistry since [its] first performance here in 1958 and we are excited to be reaching across the five boroughs this summer for all to experience the joy of dance," Alvin Alley artistic director Robert Battle told The Daily News. "It's the way to give back by sharing uplifting revolutions and saying thank you with each step."

Festivities start Saturday with an afternoon family workshop of West African dance with live drumming, followed by an evening of performance by the Alvin Alley American Dance Theater at the Amphitheater at Corona Park's SummerStage.

"New York is an expensive city, and the arts are not immune to that," City Parks Foundation dance curator and programs manager Danri Gee said. The former Alley alum has been bringing dance and arts to the city's sometimes overlooked communities for free through the nonprofit organization for more than 16 years.

"I think dance for some people could still be a little foreign and off-putting and even though Alvin Alley is a very popular and well known company, after the past few years, people are hurting in the pockets," she continued. "And for us to be able to bring such a well known, amazing company, like Alvin Alley to the parks for free is a huge accomplishment. And I think it's a huge gift to the city of New York.

Hip hop innovator Remmie Harris' acclaimed work "Lazarus" will be featured on Saturday's program, alongside the filmed Alvin Alley American spirituals-based masterpiece "Revelations."

Inspired by the life and times of the company's late-trailblazing namesake, Harris' one hour, two-act, 15-person ballet, which premiered in 1958, addresses the racial inequities that existed when the Texas-born Alley founded his company in 1958, and those that are still with us.

Set to a soundtrack produced by Damien Ross and featuring Nina Simone, Terence Trent D'Arby, Michael Kiwanuka and Odetta, "Lazarus" is credited with breathing new life into the Alvin Alley legacy.

"One of the brilliant parts of Mr. Alley is that he'd already decided a long time ago that he was celebrating choreographers other than himself and having them set work on this company," Harris said. "And I don't know any other company that is set up that way. And I think this is a reason why Alley is still around as a company, because we mostly hear that when a choreographer dies, the company soon dies after. But unlike those folks, Mr. Alley figured out a way, and that was staying alive actively and physically through new work of choreographers."

"And, my God, I had no clue what this work would do, or where it would land. So I never thought about it twice, and once it happened, I said, 'Whoa this is massive!' But I'm more than honored and happy and humbled by the thought that I may be breathing life into the company."

The Alley Moves NYC festival will also feature a Latin-style dance class at Gil Heron Amphitheater in the Bronx on Sunday, a Bryant Park Picnic performance by Alley II on July 25, an "Alley" screening at Staten Island's Snug Harbor Cultural Center on July 29 and a West African dance class on Beach 17 Fair Rockaway in Queens on July 30.

Events conclude on July 31 with a West African & Hip-Hop Dance Workshop at Jackie Robinson Park in Harlem and Aug. 1 with a screening of "Alley" at Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem.

Classes and workshops are a part of Alley Extension, which provides dance and exercise classes for people of all ages, and Alley Arts in Education programs.

"Alley Alley said that "Dance came from the people and should always be delivered back to the people! And I emphasize 'always' and in all ways as we launch Alley Moves NYC." Battle said.
Canadian dancer looks to inspire the next generation

Ontarian Hannah Alissa Richardson returns to Toronto with the theatre that made her feel seen as a racialized performer

Hannah Alissa Richardson first saw the Alvin Alley American Dance Theater at Toronto’s Meridian Hall at 12 years old, 12 years ago. Dancing since age three, and already active in the competitive circuit, Richardson had never seen so many BIPOC dancers on stage at once. Born to Trinidadian and Filipino parents and growing up in Vaughan, Ont., Richardson says prior to that night, “I was used to being the only person of colour on stage, I thought that was just normal.”

When Alvin Alley returns to Toronto’s Meridian Hall this February, Richardson won’t be there in the audience – she’ll be on stage as the sole Canadian in her inaugural season with the company.

Alvin Alley (1931-1999) created his eponymous company in 1958 to preserve and celebrate African-American dance and culture. Since its genesis, the New York-based company has enriched and expanded the definitions of modern American dance as a whole, inspiring and eventually training generations of dancers with the establishment of what is now the Aliley School.

Seeing works by Aliley and the best contemporary African-American choreographers and dancers in the company was nothing short of life changing for the young Richardson. On a phone call from New York between costume fittings and rehearsals, she choked up as she relives the joy she experienced seeing the company on stage, and the pride in now being one of its dancers, perhaps inspiring the next generation.

Not long after that fateful night, Richardson auditioned for a summer intensive program at the Aliley School. She was accepted, though her competition schedule would not permit her to attend until she was 14. “It was my first time really leaving Canada and travelling,” says Richardson, recounting that month in New York, where she now spends plenty of time. “My parents traded weekends to come stay with me.”

After finishing high school, Richardson joined the prestigious full-time program at the Aliley School, graduating with honours in 2019. Richardson then danced with Aliley II, the bridging program for dancers between school and a company position.

It was there where Richardson worked with Aliley director Ronni Favors gave Richardson and classmates a powerful bit of advice: “Be a sponge” when it comes to learning. “Absorb all the information.”

Richardson continues, “Not only from the people in the front of the room but from your co-workers, peers that you’re dancing beside. Absorb information from outside of the elite; from students’ shows, plays and commercials, because there’s always something to learn. Grab a little something from everybody and put it in your toolbox to use for the future.” It’s a teaching that Richardson still abides by, committed to continuously learning and improving.

The current show’s Saturday evening bill includes Aliley and Mary Barnett’s Survivors, a tribute to Nelson and Winnie Mandela, Aliley’s seminal work Revelations and MacArthur Fellow Kyle Abraham’s Are You in Your Feelings? Richardson describes Abraham’s 32-minute work as a mixtape that elevates and celebrates, featuring the music of Kendrick Lamar, Erykah Badu, Maxwell and Drake to name a few. The pairing of contemporary dance with modern-day R&B, hip-hop and soul music is what makes this piece so exciting for Richardson. “Just seeing the two go hand in hand, it’s really beautiful, really fun and really entertaining to watch.”

This full circle moment in Richardson’s career comes in part thanks to the “village” that supported her: her parents, brothers, friends, boyfriend. “You can do it by yourself, but what’s the point of being successful with no one to share it with?”

Richardson’s final words of advice to aspiring dancers: “Just because the professionals make it look effortless, it isn’t. ‘Not everything’s going to be easy, the challenges are great... to get to where you want to be, you’ve got to fall in love with hard work, and don’t give up.”

Special to The Globe and Mail

The Alvin Alley American Dance Theater is returning to Toronto’s Meridian Hall Feb. 3 and 4.
Spotlight Gets Brighter For an Ailey Dancer

By: Siobhan Burke
December 9, 2022 (Online: 12/7/22)

Jacquelin Harris is expanding her repertoire, with role debuts in store for the latest season.

By SI OB HAN BURKE

During a recent free hour after her morning class, before afternoon rehearsals and an evening performance, the dancer Jacquelin Harris was brushing up on some familiar material. It was the third day of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s season at New York City Center, 27 shows in three and a half weeks — a marathon, as always, for the troupe’s 31 dancers.

Harris, who joined the company in 2014, had been expecting to perform in Alvin Ailey’s “Pas de Duke” — originally a star vehicle for Judith Jamison and Mikhail Baryshnikov — in mid-December. But she had been summoned into the role earlier to replace an injured colleague.

Fortunately, she already knew it inside and out. To the effervescent horns of the Duke Ellington music, she swept across a City Center studio with bladelike leaping turns. As if buoyed by a gust of air, her body sprang into a layout, one leg kicking up as her torso arched back ecstatically. When Matthew Rushing, Aliley’s associate artistic director, asked her to repeat one step, she anticipated his feedback, applying it before he even said it out loud.

“You took my note; you knew the note!” Rushing said, and they both burst into laughter. He offered a few other suggestions by way of fine-tuning, or, as he put it, “I’m being petty because it’s so great.” The coaching session ended 20 minutes early.

At 30, and with a decade of Ailey experience behind her, Harris has emerged as a quietly confident, eminently capable star.

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Jacquelin Harris joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 2014.
Spotlight Gets Brighter For an Ailey Dancer

CONTINUING FROM PAGE 6:

among the company’s current roster, a dancer of transitive ability and over-deepening expressive range. She is grounded as she is electrifying, whether shape-shifting under a disco ball in Alwin Brown’s “Bash!” or leading the solemn, prayerful opening section of the classic “Revelations.”

“She’s a little bit unapproachable,” Robert Battle, the Alvin company’s artistic director, said in an interview. “I used to say: ‘Does she know how to get tired? Run out of breath onstage?’ It’s amazing, it really is.”

He recalled seeing Harris several years ago in Ailey II, where she was a member before joining the main company, “and immediately gravitating to her energy, her vibe — her sense of seeming carefree, yet like a muse,” he said. “She’s drawn to the movement. You know exactly what she wants you to see, and that takes a lot of control. She’s a natural.”

This season, Harris expands her repertoire with several new roles. Her current schedule includes debuts in Tyla Tharp’s exuberant “Roy’s Toys,” a company premiere opening Friday, Kyle Abraham’s “Are You in Your Feelings?”, a new piece fueled by a hip-hop, soul and R&B playlist; and Paul Taylor’s pared-down “Duet.” If you’ve seen Ailey anywhere, you might recognize Harris as this year’s poster girl, hunting swayward and wrapped in gold.

But her steady, ready-for-anything disposition has also taken her beyond the Ailey fold. Over the past few years, she has been a standout in projects of the Merce Cunningham Trust — most notably “Night of 100 Solos,” the 50th anniversary honoring what would have been Cunningham’s 100th birthday — and in two programs of Tharp’s choreography at City Center, as part of a cast of ballet and modern-dance luminaries hand-picked by Tharp.

“She’s one of the finest dancers in New York right now,” said Frances Leat, the Cunningham Trust’s licensing director, who worked closely with Harris in preparation for “Night of 100 Solos.” That was Harris’s first opportunity to see Cunningham’s convoluted movement, but you wouldn’t have known it.”

“Her body language is so expressive, so natural,” Leat said. “I think she’s just perfect for the role.”

“Duet” is a piece that Harris has been performing with Ailey since last year in “Second Stage,” a work of uncompromising physical demands and humanity heroic partnering, and this year in the meticulously choreographed “Scenes from a Marriage” by Sofia Contemporary, which also requires extreme trust between partners.

As Harris’s career continues, Gilmer has been drawn to her fearless ability to change, “She’s always changing in her dancing,” he said. “I feel like she’s always evolving, always growing.”

In this season, Harris has been working with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, a company dedicated to “all forms of dance that are part of the company’s mission,” he said. “It’s been a great experience.”

Harris, who is from Charlotte, N.C., took her first dance class when she was just 2. She trained for competitions and won a local scholarship, then moved to New York to study at the Juilliard School. She was featured in the 2004 documentary “Boys and Girls,” which highlighted her dedication to dance.

To an extent, Harris, who has a reserved but assured demeanor, recognizes a certain facility within herself: the openness that some of her colleagues speak of. In an interview at the Ailey headquarters in Midtown, between rehearsal sessions, she reflected on the perception that she easily picks up new material.

“I feel like my body can naturally do it — she said before passing to consider her words, pausing both hands on her torso and smiling, as if in gratitude. “My body holds me down.”

Harris, who is from Charlotte, N.C., took her first dance class when she was just 2. She trained for competitions and won a local scholarship, then moved to New York to study at the Juilliard School. She was featured in the 2004 documentary “Boys and Girls,” which highlighted her dedication to dance.

“Boys and Girls,” a film about dance and the importance of having a supportive and encouraging environment, served as her inspiration. She was drawn to the characters in the film, who overcame obstacles and achieved their goals through hard work and dedication.

Harris has been working with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater since 2012, and has since been featured in numerous productions, including “Revelations,” “The Gathering,” and “For Colored Girls.” Her exceptional technique and emotional depth have earned her critical acclaim and recognition within the dance world.

Despite her success, Harris remains grounded and dedicated to her craft. She continues to push herself and explore new horizons, always looking to grow and evolve as a dancer. Her talent, determination, and passion for dance continue to inspire and motivate those around her.
25 Years Strong: Vernard Gilmore

By: Jennifer Stahl
April 2022 (Online 4/13/22)

At age 46, Vernard Gilmore considers himself “the Tom Brady of Ailey” (minus the recent retirement announcement). 2022 marks 25 years at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and the veteran dancer says he’s still excited to get onstage each season. “I feel like every year I’m progressing,” he says. “I just keep setting goals for myself, and trying to reach those goals.” Gilmore believes the key to his longevity boils down to passion: “It’s because of my desire to always want to be better, to strive for excellence, to keep investigating and discovering.”

His cross-training regimen: Although his gym time varies based on the company’s weekly schedule, Gilmore always prioritizes conditioning. He typically fits in strength training (focused on stabilizing his core) twice a week, resistance training (using weights) two to three times a week, yoga two to three times a week and floor barre every day.

His daily must-do: Gilmore is certified in the Zena Rommett Floor-Barre technique. “It’s a low-impact, very efficient way of thinking about movement without having gravity work against you,” he says. “You’re the car and the car mechanic at the same time, so you can investigate what’s going on.”

A favorite exercise: Squats with a 22-kg (nearly 50 pounds) kettlebell held at the chest to strengthen his back.

Self-care strategy: Once a week, Gilmore sees a chiropractor who’s also an osteopath. “You have to build a village around you that keeps you healthy,” he says.

Major injury: In 2019, Gilmore tore his bicep while practicing a lift before a show in London. “Because I’d already been keeping my body in great shape, I was able to recover in three or four months, but it was definitely a reckoning,” he says. “It made me want to figure out how to work more efficiently, to be more attentive to everything I’m doing.”

The mind game: Gilmore uses the app Elevate, a brain-training tool that he’s found sharpens his communication skills and helps with his public speaking for Ailey outreach activities.

Favorite healthy snack: “I call wheatgrass ‘the fountain of youth.’”
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 unmannered James Gilmer.

By GIA KOURLAS

December is never 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.

Children is not just looming. It's here. Even Gilmer's plans to attend a dance performance just after Thanksgiving were thwarted: Performances 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 already, 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 settled into "Revelations" after learning the Ailey masterwork from the veteran dancer and associate artistic director, Matthew Rushing.


James Gilmer at the Ailey studios on West 55th Street, in "really smart in all senses of the word," a colleague says.
CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

What was it like to face new challenges, to find new ways to express yourself, and then to have to go into lockdown? Gilmer might have been getting his bearings, but it was clear from the start that he was a standout.

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

But Gilmer's first serious dance language was ballet. Somehow unusually for an Alley dancer, he had an even earlier 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 physically unassuming — his dancing has an ease, a looseness that can be rare in ballet dancers. "I'm a peacock," says Gilmer, Alley's artistic director, recalling 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 exuding, but really gifted.'"

Ballew admires Gilmer's noble bearing and what he called "a genuine heart."

"It's really nimble in all senses of the word," he said, "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," Ballew said. "He's able to meet the challenges of the different choreographers that come in because he's so open."

Ballew was struck when coaching him in Alvin Ailey's "Raiders" with how Gilmer listened. "His whole body is an ear," Ballew said. "You get up and immediately respond 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 Alley 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 to see Alley and always kind of dreamed of Alley," he said.

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

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 onstage," he said, "flushing a quick grin. 'No 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 unseen and somewhat unexpressed as a person and artist."

Gilmer wanted more than "lights-and-a-tunic kind of 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 "very visionary type of a boss."

"I had the privilege of working with women in general, he said, including Twaya Tharp, who cast him in the premier of "Second Dust" opposite Jacqueline Harris, also of Alley, for her "Petra Now" program at City Center. During the working process — it was extensive — Tharp told him to train like a boxer."

"What did that mean?" "Firework" he said. "Having a sense of lift, 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 must be. Being able to just be in your bones and muscles. And that's the performance."

Is that why his feet were especially late and lively in "Laurel," a hip-hop work by Ronnie Harrison, this season? He was so grounded, so relaxed despite, at times, the choreography's breakneck speed. Yet Gilmer's performance, particularly in the dance's more dramatic moments, was exquisitely tender, precise, resolute, 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 that I was trying to create and get moving again," Gilmer said. "I've been able to really take that and run with it."

"There are obvious 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 I won't." (He likely won't.)

"At the very least, Ballew plans on bringing "Second Dust" into the Alley 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, 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 like whenever I'm stuck in a room, I'm always drawn to the studio." As a dancer, Gilmer wants to share it, to, like the women he's worked with, be generous as possible. "It also elevates the responsibility because I've been given so incredibly much," he said. "So to give it back to the audience in that way is really all I ever intend to do."
Constance Stamatiou Dances on the Shoulders of Giants

By: Naya Samuel

June 16, 2022

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater company dancer continues the legacy of uplifting Black women in the arts.

Sports Illustrated and Empower Onyx are putting the spotlight on the diverse journeys of Black women across sports—from the veteran athletes, to up-and-coming stars, coaches, executives and more—in the series, Elle-evate: 100 Influential Black Women in Sports.

Constance Stamatiou never thought her first ballet class would lead to her performing under the stars, to a sold out audience in the ancient, open-air Odeon theater of Athens, Greece. And the Charlotte native certainly didn’t know her Greek father would be watching from the audience, having just reunited with his mother and sister after 10 long years. The rain poured and the resilient audience roared anyway, creating a roof of sorts with their umbrellas, all to see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater company’s signature work, Revelations.

“We finally get out there, and we’re dancing with these views, with our heads up high,” Stamatiou says. “All you see is the stars, the mountains, and the Parthenon temple lit up. It was like dancing in heaven.” If it sounds like a dream, “it’s because it is,” she adds. But it’s these surreal, otherworldly moments that have kept her buoyed to the Ailey family—and to dance, as an athlete—for years, and through seasons, including motherhood. As she gears up for AAADT’s Lincoln Center season this June, Stamatiou reflects on what it means to carry on the work of founder Alvin Ailey, and to dance on the shoulders of the Black women he so often centered in his work, and his life.

Stamatiou cheekily describes her younger self as “that kid with too much energy.” Her mother’s job at a TJ Maxx up the street from what would become her first dance school, set the course for the rest of her life. “She decided to enroll me there and I just fell in love with dance.” Stamatiou went to North Carolina Dance Theater, which is now Charlotte Ballet and then to a performing arts school, NorthWest School of the Arts. “That led me to pursue dance in college, which brought me to SUNY purchase,” she says. “I studied there for a year and one of my professors was like, ‘What are you doing for the summer?’”

At the time, she had never heard of AAADT, founded in 1958 by visionary choreographer Alvin Ailey. The company grew from a now-historic performance in March 1958 at the 92nd Street YMCA, led by Ailey and a group of young, Black modern dancers. Since then, AAADT has gone on to perform for over 25 million people, in 71 countries and on six continents, and were named “cultural ambassadors to the world” by a 2008 U.S. Congressional resolution. In Ailey’s own words, he wanted to “hold a mirror to society, so that people can see how beautiful they are.” Stamatiou didn’t even realize the myriad of ways she hadn’t felt seen in North Carolina until she touched down in New York City at Ailey’s headquarters as a fellowship student.

The Ailey School is the official school of AAADT, and for some dancers it’s the first step into eventually joining the company or moving onto Broadway. Stamatiou remembers the initial culture shock of training in Hell’s Kitchen. “Growing up in North Carolina, I didn’t really know much about Ailey or places like Dance Theatre of Harlem at all,” she says. “All I saw was white ballerinas. So when I got here and there was so much culture, so much diversity, I wasn't expecting that. I didn't know there were so many Black and brown dancers, I was like, Where have I been just sheltered in North Carolina?”

There was something about the Ailey organization that took it a step further for Stamatiou—this was the first space she had been in the dance world where the waif thin body type wasn’t the only acceptable form. She literally saw herself—countless versions of herself, actually—walking around the halls of the school, teaching classes in the studios, gracing stages across the city, the country, the world. “I saw all these bodies and women and men that looked like me. It gave me life, and it made it all more obtainable,” she says. “And when I saw AAADT perform masterpieces that were so relevant to what's going on in the world—so relevant to our ancestors—that really moved me. On top of that, to see that strength while they were performing...I saw athletes. I thought, I can use my gymnastics training with this company too, because they do it all. I have
the classical ballet training. If I need to put on a pointe shoe or a ballet slipper, I can do that. But also, if they want me to flip around, or put on a sneaker and do some hip hop or Limón, or Graham, I can do that too.” By 2007, Stamatiou was performing with the company professionally.

She found endless inspiration in her new peers. That freedom of expression encouraged her to lean into building muscle and toning up. Now as a certified Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis instructor, the need for added muscle was motivating. “I was long and lanky, and so I started going to the gym. I started getting into Gyrotonic and Pilates and that did wondrous things for me with dance,” Stamatiou says. “I needed that muscle, to sustain my balance. I needed that muscle to work with my flexibility, so I wouldn’t be prone to injuries. Now I’m going on 38 years old, and I feel like I’m in the best shape of my life. It’s all been inspired by seeing representation on stage, seeing these strong Black and brown bodies and seeing that they can be so strong, but graceful at the same time, and have lines for days. Pulling from his “blood memories” of growing up in Texas, Ailey used the Blues and gospel as inspiration, reflected in famed works like Revelations (1960), a canonical work in American ballet, and in dance history. Though Ailey’s signature piece uses Black spirituals, song-sermons, gospel songs and holy Blues, the work has become a transcendent experience, sharing with the world what he believed to be the United States’s richest treasure: Black cultural heritage, “sometimes sorrowful, sometimes jubilant, but always hopeful,” he famously said. Since its 1960 premiere, the ballet has been performed continuously around the world, often as the closing number in Ailey programs, and has become the most widely seen modern dance work in the world.

Stamatiou is keenly aware of the weight she is carrying as she and her peers continue Ailey’s work decades after his death. “I mean, this is a man’s vision that started during the Civil Rights era,” she says. “He grew up working the cotton fields, he grew up when Black people were migrating to places like California for better work opportunities. He put all of his blood memories into masterpieces, and audiences were just captivated, but why were they captivated, even at that first performance? They could recognize it, they could relate to it. It was the pain, the struggles, the journey, and then this strength and joy, this resilience, this grit and grace that you were seeing at the same time. They were feeling the lowest of lows and the highest of highs. For him to be able to travel around internationally with a company full of Black and brown dancers was just unheard of. They weren’t sure how they were going to be perceived internationally, but the world loved them. To this day, we’re considered the cultural ambassadors of the world.”

Revelations is not the only famed piece in the Ailey canon. Stamatiou is intimately familiar with one of the company’s most popular works, Cry, choreographed by Ailey in 1971 as a Mother’s Day gift to his mom, and it just celebrated 50 years. This 16 minute grueling solo is considered an honor to perform, due to the legacy of women that have held the role, beginning with the legendary Judith Jamison (Artistic Director Emerita of AAADT). Stamatiou has become a key soloist for the work, and even accompanied Jamison in a 2019 Ted Talk to perform both Cry and Revelations. “He created a masterpiece that I think is the essence of what womanhood, what motherhood is still to this day. It’s just been such an honor to be able to perform that piece. Cry especially is something I can relate to being a mom, and it’s something that I hope that I can continue to perform across the world and inspire other young, Black and brown dancers, just like how I was inspired, with seeing the company.”

Today, happily back at her dance home after a hiatus to raise her two children Thanos and Savannah (just 19 months apart), Constance is gearing up for return of the Company’s annual Lincoln Center Run. She’s grateful for the legacy Ailey cemented through his artistry, in his relationships, and in this delicate space he carefully crafted for Black artists, and especially Black women. Beyond muses, partners, and friends, he saw the Black women around him as powerful influencers, visionaries and co-creators. “We know that he went off to school in California and he became friends with [actress and choreographer] Carmen de Lavallade. And then, there was a performance of (historic choreographer and anthropologist) Katherine Dunham, where he first saw the representation of himself. All of that is what really made him get into the studio and start creating movement, playing with the idea that he was going to start his own company. There is this deference to Black women in Mr. Ailey’s work, that is just so special. That is our legacy.” Naya Samuel is a contributor for Empower Onyx, a diverse multi-channel platform celebrating the stories and transformative power of sports for Black women and girls.
Introducing Our 2022 “25 to Watch”

By: Gigi Berardi

December 20, 2021

Ashley Green (above) with Whim W'Him's Jeanne Duvalier

ASHLEY GREEN
Dancer, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Ashley Green was a standout dancer—and actor—throughout Whim W’Him’s all-digital 2020–21 season, her first with the company. Artistic director Olivier Wevers, who discovered her soon after her graduation from Point Park University, says her vitality is “a rare gift. She’s a creative soul, radiating joy, an extraordinary collaborator with an innate way of approaching movement that pulls you in.” The 23-year-old picked up a 2021 Princess Grace Award last summer, and shortly thereafter moved across the country to join Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. “Explosive, in a word,” describes Alvin artistic director Robert Battle. “She’s not trying on the movement, she’s living it. Even in a little Instagram improvisation, she jumps through the screen.” This unpretentious, passionate dancer has staying power, predicts Battle. “She’ll continue to grow.” —Gigi Berardi

CARTER WILLIAMS
Ballroom dancer

Ballroom phenom Carter Williams’ fluidity and striking stage presence have landed him accolades you don’t expect to see on a 19-year-old college student’s resume. He’s already been a four-time World Latin Dance Finalist and a three-time National DanceSport Latin Dance Champion. On screen, his credits include the first two seasons of NBC’s “World of Dance” and three seasons of “America’s Got Talent.” His longtime private coach Afton Wilson says it’s not just Williams’ extreme versatility, but also his super-sensitive partnering and precision turns that make him stand out on a crowded floor. He’s racking up even more wins as a member of Utah Valley University’s dance team as he works towards a degree in marketing and aims for a professional career. With his easy, self-assured air and clean, quick moves, he already dances like a pro. —Gigi Berardi
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 pescaterian 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 YouTube 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.
Feeling the Beat
By: Courtney Celeste Spears
May/June 2019 Issue

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). But what many people don’t know is 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.

Samantha (in red) with her twin sister, Jenelle, in sixth grade
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.
SHINE ON

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RICHARD PHIBBS

SHAPE
Shine On! The Amazing Body Benefits of Sweat
By: Tula Karras
December 2021 Issue

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 Stainastou, 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.
TOWN & COUNTRY

Amazing Grace – Still, We Dance: An Ode to the Deliverance and Joy of Self-Expression

By: Kibwe Chase-Marshall
September 2020 Issue
Every year, in theater and concert halls around the globe, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater takes audiences to church. For just any house of worship, but the working-class, Black, Southern temples of real Texas, the gospel they see and feel in Revelations, the company’s signature dance, which has been staged more often than the Trump’s other celebrated works, for some 25 million fans.

This year Revelations turns 60, and it has lost none of its incantatory power. Against the backdrop of both a global pandemic that disproportionately targets 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.

Ailey’s writing is spiritual, and his choreography has given generations of Black dancers across the globe a world of complex movement and emotion to inhabit,” the critic Dario Jefferson. As a young woman, Debbie Allen saw Revelations, and it was a watershed moment. "It was the permission I needed to throw away my pointe shoes and kickball change to the fact that I could really express," she tells T&L. "Decades later, when Alvin Ailey founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, I knew she had not just taken up a part, she's inhabiting an aesthetic. Campbell's long-legged athleticism and richly colored, dark skin evoke Jamison's impossibly long legs, and the young dancer refines their craft through the precision and the responsibility of presenting Black audiences with the breathtaking experience of watching black performers. As a Black woman living in America, I was able to relate. Revelations talks about how we carry these burdens, but there is still hope, and that's what allows me to perform," she says.

Like every major arts organization, Ailey was caught in the coronavirus crisis, forced to cut short its season and instead broadcast repertory works and a new piece online, on social media and its Ailey II. Accessing free streaming platforms, its annual season in New York City Center, where its iconic ballroom would have had pride of place this December, is on hold as of press time out of concern for the safety of both audience and performers. Dancers, though, are an understated crew, and Ailey's made it known that they would not be forgotten. The company turned its cramped apartments and sprawling yards into makeshift stages to record performances for You Tube. They are joyful and defiant and ultimately liberating, an ode to resilience that runs through Revelations and much of the Ailey oeuvre. "Dancers don't do this because it's their job," says artistic director Robert Battle. "They do it because it's their passion; it's the essence of who they are. So they will be creative, and we will be creative, and we will make it through this."
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.

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, Aku’a 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 on screen, lowering their arms with their palms facing forward. As the clips accumulate, we see family members, dogs and children. The result is a beautiful, 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 Benjie 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 Coker 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.”
The life and work of the choreographer are illuminated in archive footage and his own words

It’s a little embarrassing, as a dance critic, to realise how little you know about the life of one of the biggest names in American choreography. Yet in the case of Alvin Ailey, there are reasons for that. His company Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater became, and remains, a worldwide phenomenon, ensuring that his artistic legacy lives on, yet obscuring the struggles and burdens of the man behind the work.

A new documentary directed by Jamila Wignot, simply titled *Ailey*, highlights that paradox from the get-go. It opens in 1988 with a triumphant Ailey receiving his country’s highest artistic distinction, a Kennedy Center Honor for lifetime contribution to American culture, with Ronald and Nancy Reagan leading the ovation. A life-affirming scene from 1960’s *Revelations*, one of the landmark dance works of the 20th century, follows. Yet in private Ailey was already ailing, and less than a year later he died of AIDS-related illness at 58.

The cause of his death wasn’t disclosed at the time, with obituaries referring only to “a rare blood disease”. In *Ailey*, Wignot lovingly goes back and forth between the man and the choreography, the loneliness of being a black figurehead in modern dance and the external demands of success.

The film has a compelling narrator: Ailey himself, speaking in interviews he recorded in the last year of his life, when he was working on an autobiography with A Peter Bailey. (The result, *Revelations*, was published posthumously in 1995.) The tapes are often remarkably candid, covering topics including Ailey’s homosexuality, which he never made public during his life.

Other talking heads fill in the gaps, with close collaborators including his early stage partner Carmen de Lavallade, and Judith Jamison, who went on to direct the company after Ailey’s death. There is archive footage of his choreography, too, from *Revelations* to a handful of lesser-known works, such as 1969’s *Masekela Langage*.

Wignot, an award-winning director whose previous work includes the documentary series *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* and the Emmy-nominated *Makers: Women in Business*, says she was approached by the production company Insignia Films to work on *Ailey*. While she had followed his company since first seeing them in college, she admits she knew little about the choreographer. “It’s a film that found me,” she says.

By coincidence, when Wignot approached Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater about making a documentary, the ensemble was about to create a new work inspired by the life of Ailey for its 60th anniversary. Footage from rehearsals of Rennie Harris’s two-act *Lazarus*, which had its premiere in 2018, is peppered throughout the film, as a contemporary echo of Ailey’s story.
“What was so great was to spend time working with dance material, and seeing how far we could push the visual language to communicate something in a film,” Wignot says.

“Sometimes in documentary there is an expectation on the part of the audience that they’ll be told everything. We rejected that from the start.”

Ailey, a child of the Great Depression era, was born in Texas in 1931. In the voiceover he recalls his beloved mother working in the fields, and his memories of picking cotton as a child. But, visually, Wignot had to get creative to represent his early life. “He’s not a person who had a trove of home movie footage,” she says wryly.

She and her team turned to footage shot by pioneering anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston as well as video clips of ordinary black life in mid-century America — material that wasn’t readily available until recently. “In the last 10 years, there’s been an incredible effort to preserve those materials and to make them accessible,” Wignot says, referencing archives at Duke University and in Texas. “I don’t know that this film could have been made a decade ago.”

Here the documentary expands on what Ailey calls “blood memories — the memories of my parents, uncles and aunts, the blues and the gospel songs that I knew from Texas”. They shaped his choreography, bringing a distinct expression of black culture to the modern dance stage, which was then a mostly white art form. (Exceptions include Katherine Dunham, whose dancing Ailey recalls in the film with still-fresh wonder.) His first hit, 1958’s Blues Suite, was inspired by the social dances he witnessed at black honky-tongs in the South.

As his company has increasingly staged pieces by a long list of new choreographers since its founder’s death, the list of Ailey works still actively performed has narrowed. The uplifting Revelations, with its gospel and blues vignettes inspired by Ailey’s childhood, may have obscured other strands of the choreographer’s work: it is fascinating to see in Ailey the punchy original ending of Masekela Language, which was inspired by the assassination of Black Panther activist Fred Hampton.

In a scene that was later cut, a dead character lies in the arms of the other dancers, and a recorded voice repeats over and over: “Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.” “It shows that he was paying close attention to the more radical wings of black politics in the country,” Wignot says.

Yet at the same time, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater found international success due to tours set up by the US state department, which regularly sent the company overseas as part of cultural diplomacy efforts. That put Ailey in a complex position as a black man whose success others were keen to appropriate; the film also shows that the company’s growth often left him exhausted and isolated by the pressure to keep up the stream of new works. His mental health took a turn for the worse in 1980, when he was affected by what is understood today as bipolar disorder.

The testimonies of those who knew Ailey in his final years are especially raw. Two days after his death, the company was back on stage — ending, of course, with Revelations. Ailey is the film we needed to understand how it came to be, and remember a man who sacrificed “everything”, as he put it, in the name of dance.

In UK cinemas from January 4, including a Q&A with the director hosted by Bonnie Greer
PBS doc steps right up to explore world of dance legend Alvin Ailey

BY KARU F. DANIELS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Documentary maker Jamila Wignot was on a mission to chronicle the life of modern dance visionary Alvin Ailey when she made a "shocking" discovery. Wignot told the Daily News. "I think, however, it's a reflection of where the filmmaking industry has been in relation to telling stories that center the experiences of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and gender-expansive people. It is woefully behind."

Wignot's documentary "Ailey," exploring the subject's triumphant life and his connection to the present dance company bearing his name, will premiere on PBS as a part of its storied "American Masters" series Tuesday.

Ailey, who died in 1989 at age 58 from AIDS-related illnesses, created the Manhattan company and its affiliated Ailey School to nurture Black artists and tell the African-American experience through dance.

The Brooklyn-based Wignot, whose directing work includes the Peabody, Emmy and NAACP award-winning series "The African-Americans: Many Rivers to Cross," said she wanted to take an "immersive" approach to the life and legacy of the Texas-born trailblazer. The 93-minute film features interviews with company dancers and choreographers who give insight into Ailey's process and legacy, including Debbie Harris, Judith Jamison, Sylvia Waters, Masazumi Chaya, Bill T. Jones and current Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater artistic director Robert Battle.

Footage of the company's rehearsal process for "Lazarus" - Harris' 2018 hip-hop-themed ballet with soundtrack featuring the voices of Terence Trent D'Arby, Odetta and Nina Simone - is interwoven throughout the film.

"I knew that I wanted to have the story told by Ailey's closest collaborators," Wignot said. "I also knew that I wanted to incorporate a contemporary dance work because Mr. Ailey's life did not end in 1989. His legacy continues today, and no documentary would be complete without a portrait of the way the company carries on his vision."

With never-before-heard audio interviews recorded in the last year of his life and rare performances, the film not only tells how its main subject found salvation through dance centering on African-American experiences, but also sheds light on how he endured racism and homophobia, mental illness and addiction.

Wignot, 44, said the rare audio recordings were the "most important discovery" for the film. "It truly opened up the possibility for the kind of intimate ... story we'd hoped to be able to make," she said. "Those became the spine of the film and offer such an extraordinary glimpse into Mr. Ailey's life as he understood and experienced it."

"The audio resurrects Mr. Ailey in a way that can lend that feeling," the filmmaker added. "To be able to hear from him directly is so incredibly powerful. The poetry of his language, the way he was so clearly alive to the world, his curiosity, passion, drive, and, yes, his melancholy all come through."

The project was started in 2017, but went through many obstacles. "It was a five-year-long process," Wignot said. "Like all independent documentaries, the initial challenge was fundraising. The other challenge was COVID."

"Our edit room opened the same day the city shuttered," she said, referencing the March 2020 pandemic shutdown that paused professional life. "My entire team was scattered ... so it dramatically shifted the collaborative process, the gathering of the archival materials, the way we communicated."

The film got the thumbs up from Battle, who has served as the Ailey company's artistic director since 2011.

"With his artistry, Alvin Ailey said, 'I'm trying to hold up a mirror to society so that people can see how beautiful they are,' " said Battle. "In the ... documentary, director Jamila Wignot holds up a mirror to Alvin Ailey, and now millions will be able to see his beauty, along with his brilliance, struggles, strength, creativity and generosity."
The problem with being Alvin Ailey was being Alvin Ailey. "Sometimes your name becomes bigger than yourself," says the dancer-choreographer Carmen de Lavallade of her late friend and colleague. Alvin Ailey. Do you really know who that is, or what that is?" Jamila Wignet’s moving and poetic documentary portrait, "Ailey," provides answers, while making clear that its subject had the same questions.

Ailey, who grew up dirt poor in Texas, the son of a nomadic single mother, became not only one of the more significant choreographers of the 20th century but a man synonymous with Black dance in America. "Did they love him, or what he represented?" asks the dancer-choreographer Bill T. Jones, echoing several of the Ailey friends and company members who appear throughout, including Judith Jamison, George Faison and Masazumi Chaya. Mr. Jones speculates that his sometime collaborator suffered the "demon" that often torments those who rise from humble origins to great heights. "If I’ve gotten this far," he says, rhetorically, "I must have pulled one over on somebody. And any day now, I may be found out."

Mr. Jones is probably the most eloquent and insightful of an unfailingly cogent group of interviewees who populate Ms. Wignet’s film, which provides history, anecdotes and analysis about Ailey and as an "American Masters" presentation seems long overdue. Like most shows in the series, it is a tribute; unlike most, it is a gloriously expressionistic treatment of its subject. (Last summer’s program about bluesman Buddy Guy took a similarly adventurous tack; perhaps it’s a trend.) Ms. Wignet uses archival film in fluidly kinetic ways, deferring to Ailey’s own words when she can—"Ailey" contains a trove of audio interviews that she marries to footage that is often chosen not necessarily for its historical relevance but for its energy. The New York of the late ’50s, when her subject founded the Ailey American Dance Theater, through the late ’80s, when Ailey died of complications related to AIDS, is evoked in a torrent of images that pay their own kind of homage to the palette of movement with which Ailey created his landmark dances, as well as the times he lived through. It also reflects the turmoil Ailey suffered—mentally, medically and in terms of his fame and place in Black culture.

The technology is available that can make sound and picture look brand new, even if it’s a half-century old—see the Beatles on Disney+. But Ms. Wignet has deliberately maintained the antique quality of much of her materials, including scratchy interviews and melty images, which not only provides ambience but helps differentiate between eras. This is particularly useful during the sequences that bookend the Ailey portrait—and occasionally interrupt it—and involve the creation of a work commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Ailey company (which took place in 2018). Robert Battle, the artistic director of the troupe, invited choreographer Rennie Harris (of the Puremovement company) to create such a work, and at the beginning of "Ailey." Mr. Harris is introduced to the young Ailey performers—through whom the new work will develop and evolve throughout the film. "We’re gonna create whatever this is," Mr. Harris jokes to laughs from the dancers. "It’s gotta be good." It is. And like "Ailey" itself, seems worthy of its subject.

Ailey
Tuesday, 9 p.m., PBS
Film looks at what made Mr. Ailey

By: Linda Matchan
July 25, 2021

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

Alvin Ailey died in 1989 at age 56, but significantly, much of the documentary Ailey was filmed in 2018 at a New York dance studio near a street named Alvin Ailey Place. As we watch a new generation of Ailey dancers taking direction from hip-hop choreographer Rosie 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 65th anniversary of the company, founded in 1958. We see him focusing intently in a screen room, watching and re-watching archival footage of Ailey, as he works to create what would become “Lazarus.”

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

What did make Mr. Ailey Mr. Ailey? The director Jamil Abdulla reveals 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 three decades 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 storied 1959 ballet “Reverie,” which draws on his awareness and appreciation of African American spirituals, gospel and blues, has been a cornerstone of cultural treasure. It’s been said to be the most widely performed modern dance work in the world.

“ Everybody let us off the stage,” former Ailey dancerreta Charles tells in the film, describing a performance in Europe. “It was about 80 some hours that we had to do, and we cover some people stand up and throw their shoes off and let the work! No matter what we did, these people would not go home.”

But Ailey’s artistic legacy is more than the sum of the dances 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 1 year old, sometimes going hungry.

“The way if you were Black, you were nothing,” Ailey says in a segment of a recently heard interview with journalist Peter Noto. He recorded over 30 interviews with Ailey before the choreographer died. “I remember seeing my mother on her knees scrabbling through a White folks’ room and caves.”

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 moves unfurled from his DNA. When he describes his rural childhood, it’s in terms of movement and the placement of body parts in space. He speaks of “people moving in the twilight,” “being glued to my mother’s leg, slapping through the trees, branches slapping against a child’s body,” looking for a place to be.

When Ailey was 17, his mother moved to Los Angeles to work in the aircraft industry and went for him a few months later. As a teenager, he was drawn to dance and theater, although he never saw Black dancers or actors onstage — “nobody to model yourself after.” Until he was 17, that is, and Katherine Dunham’s company came to town. Ailey was shocked.

“I couldn’t believe there were Black people on the legitimate stage,” he says. “I was just taken into another realm.”

And he remained in this realm until he died, sacrificing everything to dance, embracing a mission that was revolutionary for his time.

Ailey created a racially diverse company with all body types to celebrate, honor and reflect Black traditions and experiences. He very consciously created dance not for the elite, but for “the man in the street.”

“Circumcision was his other side,” says Sarita Allen, Ailey’s former dancer and one of the first to hire Ailey’s company. “— the people of the community, the people of the streets.”

Ailey’s work also was lonely and haunting, occasionally leading him to dark and destructive places. He left people in — literally. Close friends never saw the inside of his apartment.

Although not a dance hero, Wignot, the film’s director, is a huge Ailey fan who first saw the company perform when he was a college student in Boston in the 1970s. So when Steven Isen and Amanda Pollock of Insignia Films approached her about directing a film about Ailey’s life, she jumped at the opportunity.

At first, Wignot says, making a film about Ailey was just an idea, with a lot of unknowns. How much could he do? What material would be available to her? How would the story? Most critically, how could she tell the story through Ailey’s eyes?

“I wanted to know where his work emerged from,” she says. “I wanted to know what was feeding him, as an artist, and a person.”

Fortunately, the Ailey company made Balanchine tapes available, and Wignot used them as a narrative device, as a sort of gritty audio equivalent of grainy footage, to also access relationships, black culture and the movement’s core. And she charted in archival material that self-reflected and evolved his life and thoughts.

Given the enduring and knock-down nature of Ailey’s work, the film called out for a contemporary embrace. “I wanted to make clear what led Ailey to his work,” Wignot says. “Ailey was sincere and vulnerable, but very alive to the world.”

With a “moment of storytelling,” she says, when they first approached the company, Battle told them they’d just communicate to the Harris work “Ailey” intertext of rehearsal notes for “Lazarus,” which addressed most intricacies Ailey faced throughout his life.

“I think the film really resonates today,” Battle says. “We see some of the same conditions today as we did in the 1930s — the poverty, the violence, the injustice. It’s a story point that for him wanting to have a connection to the future.

“The arts are the artifice of human survival, and so this film offers us another point of view — that Ailey could do it, then why can’t I? We can’t all be Alvin Ailey, but we can tell our story. We should tell our story because we could liberate someone else.”
The Man Behind the Dances

By: Gia Kourlas

July 23, 2021

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" (1979), 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 2000s. “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 Wojo’s work features archival 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.”
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 sly 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 confessions 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.

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**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 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 ongoing, 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 AADT artistic director Robert Battle, "I know that now, more than ever, Revelations is urgently needed."

The piece has made a profound impact. AADT 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 his 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 Residence. “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 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 RUSHING

“One, in Germany, we had already gone offstage 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,” “Rocks 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.” —JF
WHEN JUDITH JAMISON GOT "DEMOTELED"

"The first two and a half years my favorite section was 'Fix Me, Jesus,' with Jimmy Travis. Then Consuelo Atlas came along and was the first person to go past the T 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

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

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."
In Moscow, the gospel of Ailey

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 soaring 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.

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