

ALVIN AILEY

2024–25
Press Kit

AMERICAN DANCE THEATER



ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*. Photo by Paul Kolnik

Founded by Alvin Ailey on March 30, 1958, **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater** is one of the most acclaimed dance companies in the world. With a repertory that boasts close to 300 works by more than 100 choreographers, it has performed in more than 70 countries on six continents and has been designated a “vital American Cultural Ambassador to the World” by a US Congressional resolution.

Forged during a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was established to uplift the African American experience while transcending boundaries of race, faith, and nationality with its universal humanity. As the Company grew, Mr. Ailey invited dancers of all backgrounds to be a part of his vision while reimagining his company as a “library of dance,” a home for a wide range of choreographers’ works that might otherwise be lost—the first modern dance company of its kind. He expanded the global audience for dance with his visionary model and technically dazzling works.

Before his untimely death in 1989, Mr. Ailey named Judith Jamison as his successor, who for 21 years brought the Company to unprecedented success—including two historic engagements in South Africa and a 50-city global tour celebrating Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s 50th anniversary. In 2005, her idea of a permanent home for AILEY was realized with the opening of The Joan Weill Center for Dance, the largest building dedicated to dance in New York City. In 2011, she selected Robert Battle as her successor, who stewarded the Company until 2023 and inaugurated the New Directions Choreography Lab. Currently, Interim Artistic Director Matthew Rushing, supported by Ailey’s artistic team, leads the Company forward during this season of *Legacy in Motion*, launching in New York City and reaching from coast to coast.

Today, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues to bring joy and elation to audiences around the globe, while expanding its repertory with works by new choreographers and upholding Mr. Ailey’s legacy for future generations.

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**

“Five Stars. The pioneering company’s warmth and athletic grace is showcased in a selection of old and new work. There’s something generous about Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. It’s there in the dancing – full of skill, passion and a charismatic warmth”

– **THE GUARDIAN, SARAH CROMPTON**

“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 choreographer Alvin Ailey's dictum that "dance is for everybody," AILEY offers performances, training, classes, and community programs through our five divisions: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, The Ailey School, Ailey Extension, and Ailey Arts In Education & Community Programs. Using the American modern dance tradition and the beauty of the African American cultural heritage, AILEY enlightens, unites, and inspires all people.



AILEY II

Founded in 1974 as the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, Ailey II has advanced Alvin Ailey's vision by giving early-career dancers the vital experience of transitioning from training as a student to becoming a professional dancer. Led by Artistic Director Francesca Harper, Ailey II is forging a new path for modern dance—one that's inclusive, experimental, and transformative.



THE AILEY SCHOOL

Founded in 1969, The Ailey School has grown into a world-renowned educational institution, led by Directors Tracy Inman and Melanie Person. The School's innovative programs echo Alvin Ailey's philosophy, providing students with the highest caliber of multidisciplinary training while encouraging them to explore their own creative voice.



THE AILEY-FORDHAM BFA

The Ailey/Fordham BFA Program is a four-year joint program offering professional dance training at The Ailey School and an exceptional liberal arts education rooted in the Jesuit tradition of intellectual development and personal attention at Fordham University.



AILEY EXTENSION

Ailey Extension offers open classes taught in-person and online by renowned instructors for people of all ages, backgrounds, and experience levels—from absolute beginners to professionals. Adult classes include ballet, hip hop, contemporary, West African, Zumba®, and more. Classes are available for dance and fitness enthusiasts of all ages and all levels. Ailey Extension also offers kids and teens classes, performance opportunities, and private group classes.



ARTS IN EDUCATION & COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Ailey Arts In Education & Community Programs (AAIE) cultivates and energizes youth and older adults to take, make, and see dance. Through our pioneering outreach programs, we reach over 10,000 participants each year, partnering with hundreds of schools, older adult facilities, and community organizations. Expanding on Alvin Ailey's vision of sharing dance with the world, we inspire people to explore their own creativity and experience the joy of movement.



AILEYCAMP

AileyCamp is an innovative six-week summer day camp run by AAIE for young people ages 11–14. The program helps youth explore their creativity and develop their self-confidence in an atmosphere of warmth, respect, and trust. More than a dance program, AileyCamp provides children with an invaluable opportunity to master their bodies and strengthen their respect for themselves and others within a supportive framework. AileyCamp is currently operating in 10 cities nationwide, including New York City.



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 the west side of the building, including four dance studios to reach a total of 16, two flexible classrooms, and much more.

ALVIN AILEY

Alvin Ailey was an incomparable dancer, a forward-facing visionary, and one of the most significant choreographers of the 20th century. His work changed the course of modern dance forever.

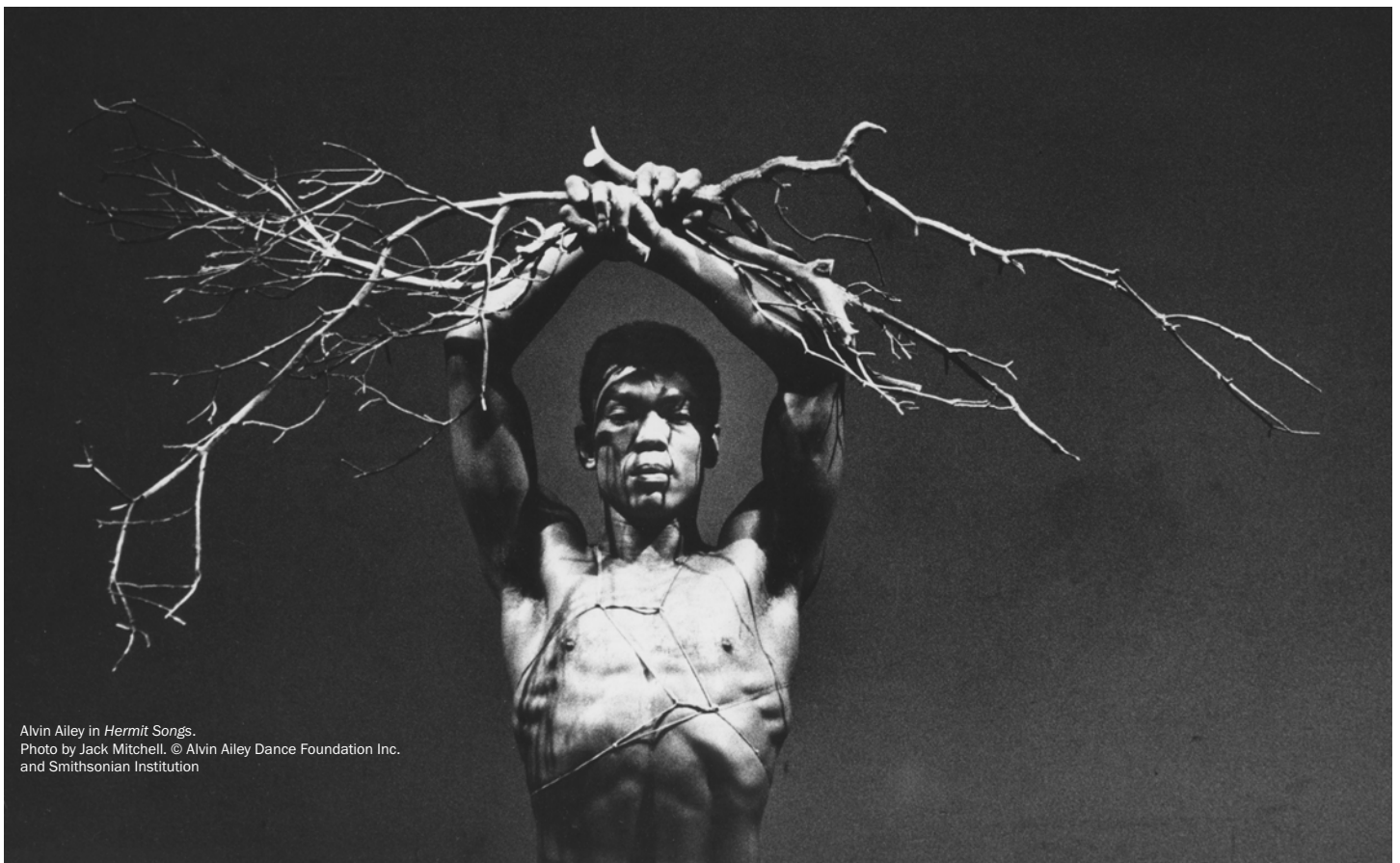
Alvin Ailey was born on January 5, 1931, in Rogers, Texas where he grew up with his mother, working in cotton fields and witnessing the river baptisms at their local church—experiences that would later inspire some of his most memorable ballets. It was after moving to Los Angeles that he experienced concert dance for the first time, seeing performances by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. Soon after, his close friend, the extraordinary dancer Carmen de Lavallade, convinced him to formally train under Lester Horton, the founder of one of the first racially integrated dance companies in the United States. With a keen eye for talent, Horton became a mentor to Mr. Ailey. After Horton's passing in 1953, Mr. Ailey became the director of the Lester Horton Dance Theater and began to choreograph his own works. The following year, he moved to New York City, where he performed in four Broadway shows—including *House of Flowers* and *Jamaica*—and continued to develop his choreography.

In 1958, Mr. Ailey founded Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to carry out his vision of a company dedicated to uplifting the African American experience while enriching and preserving the legacy of modern dance. The creation of his masterpiece *Revelations* in 1960 cemented his reputation as a choreographer of unique vision, with the ability to transcend racial barriers and connect deeply to people's humanity. Mr.

Ailey 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. He was also a pioneer of programs promoting arts in education. In 1989, he founded AileyCamp, a summer day camp for children to explore their creativity through dance and the arts—the last initiative he spearheaded before his untimely death.

Throughout his lifetime, Mr. Ailey collaborated with other outstanding American artists including Romare Bearden, Duke Ellington, Langston Hughes, and Mary Lou Williams, to name a few. He was awarded the highest distinctions in the arts, including the Kennedy Center Honors in 1988 in recognition of his extraordinary contribution to American culture. In 2014, he posthumously received the Presidential Medal of Freedom—the country's highest civilian honor—in recognition of his contributions and commitment to civil rights and dance in America. When Mr. Ailey died on December 1, 1989, *The New York Times* said, “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.”

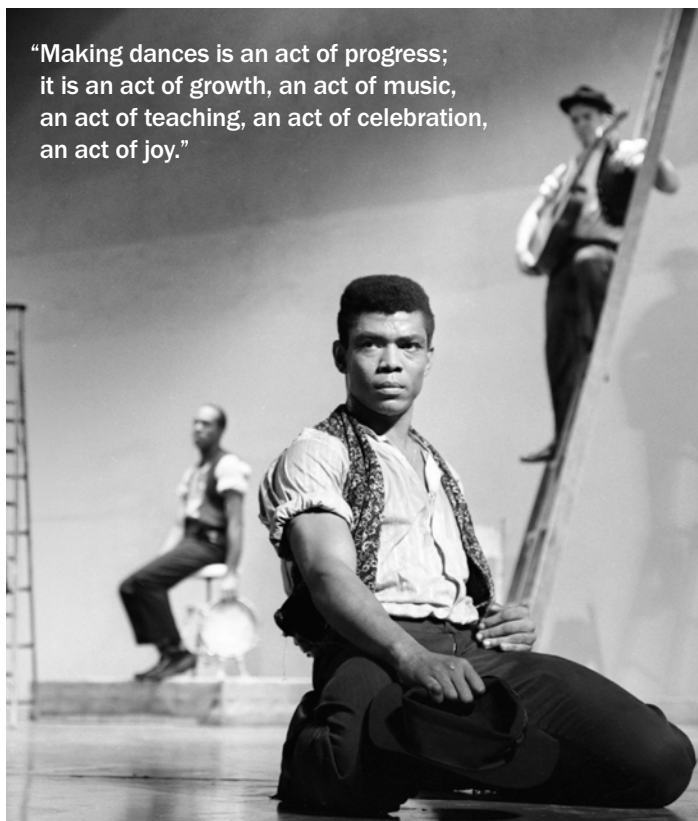
Mr. Ailey was a trailblazer, a man fully dedicated to his art form who generously shared his passion with everyone he encountered, from artists to audiences. His legacy lives on through his ballets—which continue to resonate with millions of people—and the AILEY organization, forever dedicated to his mission of returning dance to the people.



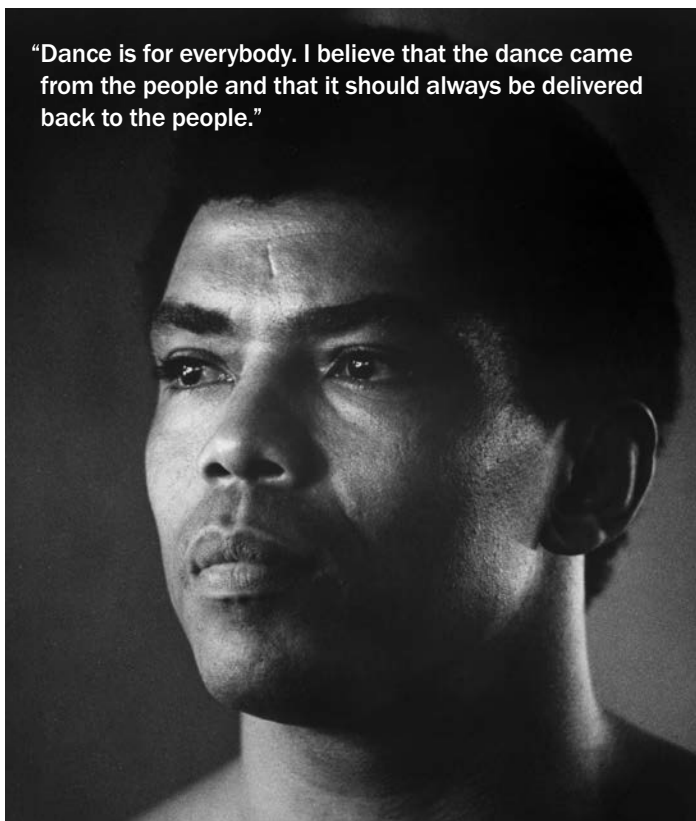
Alvin Ailey in *Hermit Songs*.
Photo by Jack Mitchell. © Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Inc.
and Smithsonian Institution

ALVIN AILEY IN HIS OWN WORDS

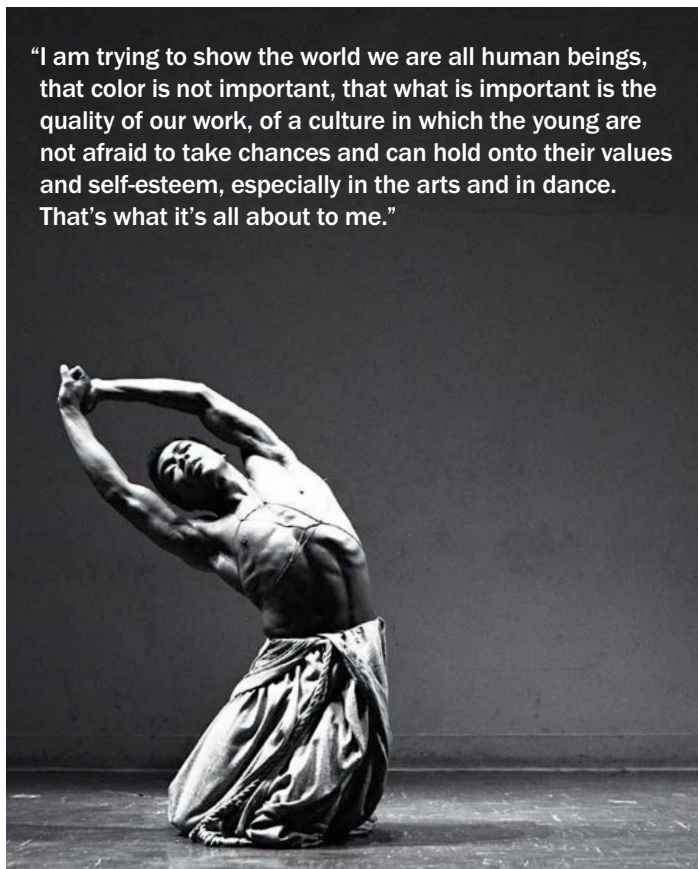
"Making dances is an act of progress; it is an act of growth, an act of music, an act of teaching, an act of celebration, an act of joy."



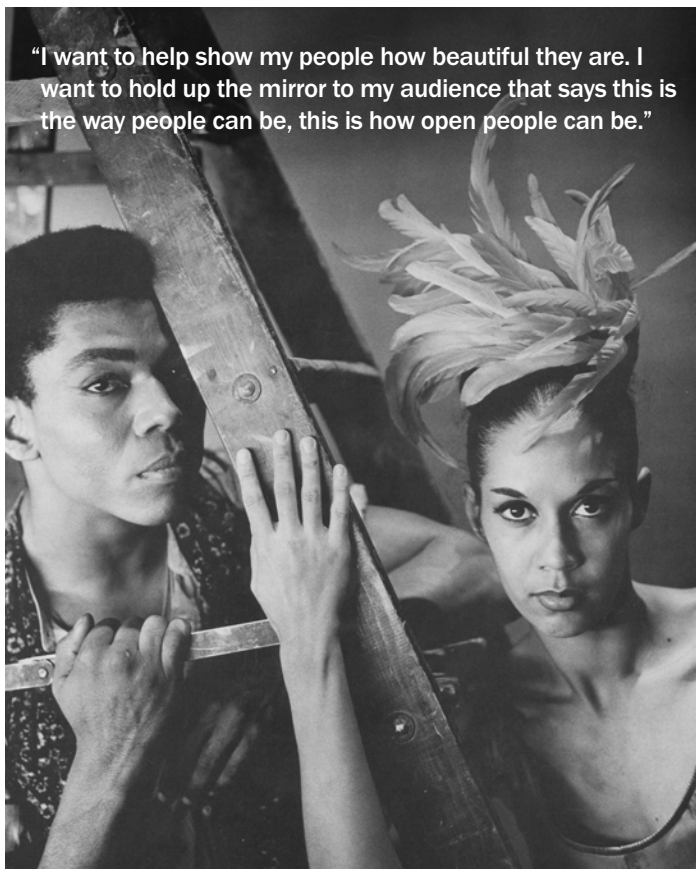
"Dance is for everybody. I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people."



"I 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."



"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

JUDITH JAMISON ARTISTIC DIRECTOR EMERITA



Judith Jamison joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1965 and quickly became an international star. Over the following 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 *Fences*, 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 was the recipient of numerous awards and honors, among them a Primetime Emmy Award, an American Choreography Award, a Kennedy Center Honor, a National Medal of Arts, a Bessie Award, the Phoenix Award, and the Handel Medallion. She was also listed in "The 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. In 2016, she received the Douglas Watt Lifetime Achievement Award from the Fred and Adele Astaire Awards.

As a highly regarded choreographer, Ms. Jamison 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 AILEY was realized and named after beloved Chairman Emerita Joan Weill. Following her retirement from the helm of the Company in 2011, Ms. Jamison continued to dedicate herself to asserting the prominence of the arts in our culture, and she remained 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. Her death on November 9, 2024 prompted an outpouring of love and admiration around the world from those who were touched by her magnificent artistry and extraordinary spirit.



MATTHEW RUSHING INTERIM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Matthew Rushing was born in Los Angeles, California. He began his dance training with Kashmir Blake in Inglewood, California, and continued his training at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. He is the recipient of a Spotlight Award and a 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. 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. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, as well as at the 2010 White House Dance Series. During his time with the Company, he has choreographed four ballets: *Acceptance In Surrender* (2005), a collaboration with Hope Boykin and Abdur-Rahim Jackson; *Uptown* (2009), a tribute to the Harlem Renaissance; *ODETTA* (2014), a celebration of "the queen of American folk music"; and *Testament* (2020), a tribute to Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* created in collaboration with Clifton Brown and Yusha-Marie Sorzano. In 2012 he created *Moan*, which was set on PHILADANCO! and premiered at the Joyce Theater. Mr. Rushing joined the Company in 1992, became Rehearsal Director in 2010, and Associate Artistic Director in January 2020.



BENNETT RINK EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Bennett Rink became Executive Director of AILEY in 2013. He first joined the organization as Manager of Special Events in 1994, became Development Director in 1998, and served as Senior Director of Development and External Affairs from 2007 to 2012. In his tenure overseeing Ailey's development and fundraising efforts, Mr. Rink led a major capital campaign to establish the organization's first permanent home, The Joan Weill Center for Dance, which opened in 2005 and attracts more than 200,000 visitors each year. Mr. Rink also oversaw the campaign to build the organization's endowment, which provides vital ongoing support for programmatic initiatives. 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. During his time as Executive Director, the Company has deepened its presence in New York City by establishing an annual spring season 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. To reach audiences beyond live performances, Mr. Rink has broadened the organization's commitment to creating film and digital content. Mr. Rink has also extended the reach and impact of AILEY's educational offerings, including the creation of new curricula and

programs that reach across generations, from elementary school children to older adults. In 2017, the organization unveiled the Elaine Wynn and Family Education Wing, providing much-needed additional studios and classroom space. The building now comprises 87,000 square feet and is the largest destination for dance in New York City. In recent years, Mr. Rink has overseen a branding initiative to express the totality of AILEY's offerings, creating greater connectivity between Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, The Ailey School, Ailey Arts in Education & Community Programs, and Ailey Extension. Most recently, he led the organization's collaboration with the Whitney Museum on *Edges of Ailey*, the first large scale museum exhibition celebrating the life, dances, influences, and enduring legacy of Alvin Ailey. The exhibition will be on display through February 9, 2025, and features on-site performances by the Ailey company alongside panel discussions, classes, and dance workshops. Mr. Rink is a graduate of Syracuse University and holds a BFA in theater.

THE COMPANY LEADERSHIP



RONNI FAVORS REHEARSAL DIRECTOR

Ronni Favors began dancing as a child in Iowa City, Iowa. After studying at the National Music Camp in Interlochen, Michigan, as recipient of the Camp Scholarship, she continued her training at The Ailey School as a Fellowship student. Favors was a member of Ailey II, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, and has received 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 Aid AileyCamp New York and provided guidance in the national implementation of the AileyCamp program. In 1997, 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, New York, and most recently, Edinburgh, Scotland. She set Alvin Ailey's *Night Creature* on TU Dance and Oregon Ballet Theatre. Favors rejoined the Company as Rehearsal Director in 2019.



CLIFTON BROWN ASSISTANT REHEARSAL DIRECTOR

Clifton Brown, from Goodyear, Arizona, began his dance training at Take 5 Dance Academy and continued in the first class of the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program. 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 ("Bessie") Award. As a guest artist 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. Brown became Assistant Rehearsal Director in 2019.



KANJI SEGAWA ASSISTANT REHEARSAL DIRECTOR

Kanji Segawa, originally from Kanagawa, Japan, began his dance training with his mother Erika Akoh, studying ballet with Kan Horiuchi and Ju Horiuchi in Tokyo. Segawa was awarded the Japanese Government Artist Fellowship in 1997 to train at The Ailey School. A former member of Ailey II and Battleworks, Segawa danced extensively for Mark Morris and performed as a principal dancer in John Adams' *Nixon in China* at The Metropolitan Opera. Since 1999, Segawa has been Creative Associate for Jessica Lang, assisting her creations for companies worldwide including American Ballet Theatre, Pacific Northwest Ballet, The Royal Ballet, and The National Ballet of Japan. With Lang, Segawa co-choreographed the world premiere production of *Turandot* for The Washington National Opera, directed by Francesca Zambello. He was a dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater under the direction of Robert Battle from 2011-2023 and became Assistant Rehearsal Director in 2024.

WHO'S WHO IN THE COMPANY



LEONARDO BRITO

(Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) began his training with Projeto Primeiro Passo and later studied at Escola Estadual de Dança Maria Olenewa, Centro de Arte Nós da Dança, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and The Ailey School. He danced with Ailey II

and then with Ballet Hispánico for five seasons. Brito has performed with the Mariinsky Ballet, Teatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro, and Focus Cia de Dança. In 2015, he received the III Brazilian Modern Dance Congress Award. He has performed works by Robert Battle, Cassi Abranches, Jae Man Joo, Gustavo Ramírez Sansano, Marcelo Misailidis, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Eduardo Vilario, and Anabelle Lopez Ochoa. Brito is also proficient in Capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art. He has appeared in the FX series *POSE*, Willy Chavarria's film *Safe From Harm*, *Out Magazine*, *Hong Kong Dance Magazine*, on the covers of *Made in Brazil* and *SSAW*, and in many other campaigns. He joined the Company in 2024. Instagram: @leonardobrittom



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'Allegro, 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.



SHAWN CUSSEAU

(St. Petersburg, Florida) began his training at the Pinellas County Center for the Arts at Gibbs High School Where he trained in ballet, modern, and jazz. In 2020, Shawn received his BFA in Modern Dance at Point Park University in Pittsburgh, PA under the

direction of Garfield Lemonius. After graduation he joined BalletX, Philadelphia's premier contemporary ballet company, where he spent three seasons. During that time, he had the privilege of dancing at The Vail International Dance Festival and Ballet Sun Valley. Shawn has performed work by Jae Man Joo, José Limón, Edwaard Liang, Camille A. Brown, Matthew Nenan, Jamar Roberts, Dwight Rhoden, Hope Boykin, Amy Hall Garner, Jennifer Archibald, and Nicolo Fonte. Mr. Cusseau joined the Company in 2023.



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.

WHO'S WHO IN THE COMPANY



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



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.



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, Beyonce, 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) (he, him, his) was introduced to dance through AileyCamp. He later began his formal training at The Chicago Academy for the Arts and the Russell 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.



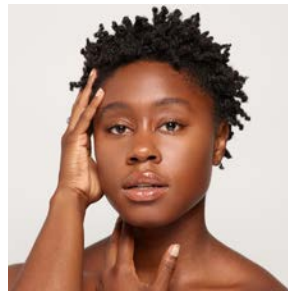
JAMES GILMER

(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, Edwaard 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. Mr. Gilmer performed in New York City Center's celebrations of Twyla Tharp in 2021 and 2022, as well as in Fall for Dance, featured in choreography by Jamar Roberts. Mr. Gilmer joined the Company in 2019. Instagram: @james.agilmer



VERNARD J. GILMORE

(Chicago, IL) began his training at Curie Performing and Creative Arts High School in Chicago under Diane Holda. He later studied at the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theater with Harriet Ross, Marquita Levy, and Emily Stein. He received first place in the all-city NAACP ACT- SO competition in 1993. He attended Barat College under scholarship and tutelage of Rory Foster and Eileen Cropley. He then studied as a scholarship student at The Ailey School and was a member of 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.



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*.

WHO'S WHO IN THE COMPANY



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.



MICHAEL JACKSON, JR.

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



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.

WHO'S WHO IN THE COMPANY



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



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 Ailey II in 2017 where she performed works choreographed by Uri Sands, Bradley Shelver, Troy Powell, Robert Battle, Darrell Grand Moultrie, and Amy Hall Garner. Ms. Mitchell joined the Company in 2019. Instagram: @_slimrin_



CHALVAR MONTEIRO

(Montclair, NJ) began training at Sharron Miller's Academy for the Performing Arts and studied 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 Ailey, Barnard College, Princeton University, Emory University, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, and New York City Ballet. 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 in Ailey's 2021 Virtual Spirit Gala, as well as at festivals and institutions across the country. Mr. Monteiro has been featured in *Vogue Beauty*, *Document Journal* for Moncler, and fashion campaigns for Uniqlo and Lululemon. He was a member of Ailey II and joined the Company in 2015. Instagram: @chlvrmntro



JESSE OBREMSKI

(New York, New York) began his studies at The Ailey School and continued at Jacob's Pillow, Springboard Danse Montreal, and Earl Mosley's Diversity of Dance. He graduated from LaGuardia High School and Juilliard. Obremski performed with the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, The Limón Dance Company,

and Gibney Company, among others. He is a sought-after educator, choreographer, and restager of José Limón's works. He received the Asian American Arts Alliance's 2016 Jadin Wong Award and achieved Boy Scout Eagle Scout rank. Obremski has been mentioned in The New York Times, on NY1, and was featured in Dance Magazine's "On the Rise" in 2019. He performed at the FINA World Championships in 2019 and at the White House for President Obama. Obremski is the Founder/Artistic Director of *Obremski/Works*, which has been presented internationally, including by The John F. Kennedy Center. He joined the Company in 2024. jesseobremski.com Instagram: @jesse_obremski

WHO'S WHO IN THE COMPANY



KALI MARIE OLIVER

(Akron, OH) began her dance training with her mother and went on to train at Nan Klinger's Excellence in Dance. She attended summer intensives at Chautauqua Institution, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and The Ailey School. Oliver graduated magna cum laude

from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in Dance. Upon graduating, she worked closely with Karole Armitage as a guest artist with Armitage Gone! Dance. Oliver spent three seasons in Ailey II under the direction of Francesca Harper, during which time she performed in the Holland Dance Festival. She has had the privilege of performing works by Alvin Ailey, William Forsythe, Robert Battle, Andrea Miller, Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrich, William Isaac, Baye & Asa, and Maurya Kerr. She was honored to be a guest artist during Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's 2023 New York City Center season and is thrilled to be officially joining the Company in 2024. Instagram: @kmo_98



ALISHA RENA PEEK

(Upper Marlboro, MD), a graduate of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program and former member of Ailey 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 Moultrie, Kirven Douthit-Boyd, 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.



JESSICA AMBER PINKETT

(Baltimore, MD) began her dance training at Baltimore Dance Tech under the direction of Stephanie Powell. She graduated from George Washington Carver Center for Arts and Technology and earned a BFA with honors in dance performance and choreography from Towson University. She has had

the privilege of performing works by Alvin Ailey, Judith Jamison, Tally Beatty, Camille A. Brown, Linda-Denise Fisher-Harrell, Jamar Roberts, and others. She has performed as a guest artist with The Black Iris Project and was a member of Ailey II from 2016-2018. Pinkett made her New York choreographic debut and performed alongside Madison McFerrin in *OPEN AIR*. In 2023, she led the world premiere of HopeBoykinDance's *States Of Hope* at the Joyce Theater. She was a member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from 2018-2021 and rejoined the Company in 2024. She continues exploring the depths of her artistry as a freelancer, teacher, choreographer, and filmmaker. Instagram: @jessica.a.pinkett



MIRANDA QUINN

(Baltimore, MD) trained in various genres of dance from the ages of 2 to 18 at Mid-Atlantic Center for the Performing Arts under the artistic direction of Shannon Torres. Ms. Quinn graduated from The Juilliard School in 2019 under the newly appointed direction of Alicia Graf Mack. Her

attendance at the school was made possible by the Jerome L. Greene Fellowship. She is an alum of the Springboard Danse Montréal, Arts Umbrella, and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago summer intensives. She joined the Company in 2019. Ms. Quinn is beyond thrilled and honored to be a part of the Ailey family and legacy. 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/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



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

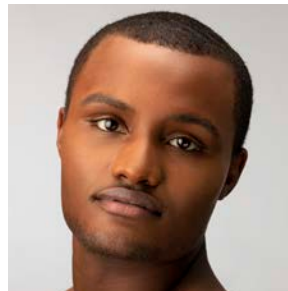
Ambassador for President Barack Obama during the Opening Ceremony of the Hannover Messe, and was the Associate Choreographer under Choreographer Hope Boykin for the City Center Encores Off-Center production of *Promenade* in 2019. Deidre danced with Ailey II from 2014 to 2016 and with Parsons Dance from 2016 to 2022. This is her second season with the Company. Instagram: @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



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. He joined the Company in 2022

WHO'S WHO IN THE COMPANY



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 Ailey, 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 Ailey, Elisa Monte, Donald McKayle, and many more. This is Mr. Vaughan's first season with the Company. Instagram: @leedeeevaughan



DANDARA VEIGA

(Alegrete, RS, Brazil) began her dance training at Social Project Primeiros Passos before receiving a scholarship to her hometown school, Escola de Dança Ballerina. She also studied at Studio Margarita Fernandez in Argentina, Opus Ballet in Italy, Annarella Academia de Ballet e Dança in Portugal, and as a

scholarship student at The Ailey School in 2016. From 2017 to 2023, Veiga danced with Ballet Hispánico. In 2023-2024, she performed with The Metropolitan Opera and projects including Site-Specific Dances, Opus Ballet, Noname, and the Black Iris Project. Veiga was named one of Dance Magazine's "25 to Watch" in 2023. She has worked with artists including Charla Gen, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Noah Gelber, Gustavo Ramirez Sansano, Eduard Liang, Christopher Huggins, and Ray Mercer. This is her first season with the Company. Instagram: @lamdandaraveiga



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 dual degree in Dance and African/African American Studies. Ms. Wallace-Green performed with New Chamber Ballet, Urban Souls Dance Company, and was

an ensemble member of *The Radio City Christmas Spectacular*. She joined DBDT: Encore! before becoming a company member with Dallas Black Dance Theatre. While there, she performed works by Hope Boykin, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Rennie Harris, Elisa Monte, and Matthew Rushing. In 2021, Ms. Wallace-Green partnered with University of Houston and Texas Southern University art museums to premiere her first solo show titled *Resilience*. She joined the Company in 2023.



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

AILEY MILESTONES

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

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

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

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

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

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

1969 – Alvin Ailey founds The Ailey 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 – Ailey II is founded to develop young artists and new dance audiences.

CBS airs “Ailey 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.

1982 – Alvin Ailey receives the United Nations Peace Medal.

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.



AILEY MILESTONES

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.”

1996 – Jennifer Dunning's loving, biographic tribute, *Alvin Ailey: A Life in Dance*, is published by Addison Wesley.

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 Ailey”* 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 that 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 Ailey** 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.

2005 – The Ailey organization celebrates the official **opening and public dedication of its new home, The Joan Weill Center for Dance**, New York City's largest building dedicated to 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 Ailey 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.



AILEY MILESTONES

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.

AileyCamp 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.



AILEY MILESTONES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

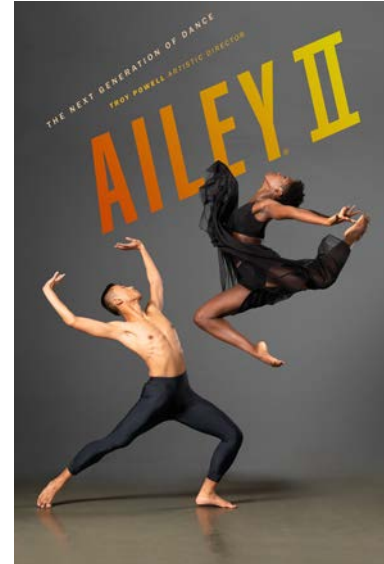
2015 – Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater makes an historic return to South Africa after nearly 20 years, performing in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and leading workshops, master classes, and lecture demonstrations in over two dozen schools, universities, and community centers.

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

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

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

AileyCamp 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.



AILEY MILESTONES

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

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

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

Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation opens The Elaine Wynn & Family Education Wing, a 10,000-square-foot expansion of Ailey's permanent home, The Joan Weill Center for Dance – New York City's largest building dedicated to dance. Designed by The Center's original architects, lu + 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 – Ailey believes the transformative power of dance is applicable for all ages and developed the **AileyDance for Active Aging** program specifically for people age 60 and older, emphasizing the importance of strength training and mobility through movement while providing an outlet for artistic expression for elderly populations. Pilot residencies were hosted by New Settlement Community Center in the Bronx, and Union Settlement, James Lenox House, and Carnegie East House in Upper Manhattan.

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

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

The Ailey organization honors Mr. Ailey's pioneering legacy with a **60th Anniversary celebration** titled **Ailey Ascending**. The celebration consists of an international tour, a Choreography Unlocked festival of performance, 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 Ailey American Dance Theater, which features the company's first two-act ballet, *Lazarus*, created by the organization's inaugural artist-in-residence Rennie Harris.

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

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

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

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

Since the launch of **Ailey All Access** in March 2020, Ailey has reached **over 50 million people in 121 countries** globally with free streaming of full-length ballets from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II repertory for the first time, along with classes, conversations and original short films created by the Ailey dancers. Ailey All Access won TimeOut New York's "Time In" Archive Treasure award for best archival streaming series and outlets like Vogue and Dance Magazine included works by Ailey artists on their "Best Of" lists for dance films created during the pandemic.



AILEY MILESTONES

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

2021 – Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater marks the **50th anniversary of Alvin 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 Ailey'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 Ailey II Artistic Director**. Ms. Harper's personal connections with Ailey are deeply rooted, as she received training at The Ailey 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.

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 Ailey.

2022 – For the first time, the Ailey organization presented ***Ailey 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, Ailey II, Ailey Extension, and Ailey Arts In Education programs, the festival delivered dance back to people of all ages across New York City, the cultural capital of the world.

2023– Matthew Rushing is named Interim Artistic Director, leading the Company forward during its 65th anniversary season.

At the invitation of First Lady Jill Biden, members of **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater** visited The White House to perform an excerpt from Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* at the National Governors Association meeting.



AILEY MILESTONES

2023– Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater returns to Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) for the first time since 2010 for its one-week Spring Season, with the return of Ronald K. Brown's *Dancing Spirit*, a tribute to living legend Judith Jamison in her 80th year.

- The UK Critics' Circle recognized Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater with four nominations in the **2023 National Dance Awards**. The Company won the **Outstanding Company** category, and Kyle Abraham's *Are You in Your Feelings?* won **Best Modern Choreography**. Yannick Lebrun was nominated for Best Male Modern Performance for Ronald K. Brown's *Dancing Spirit*, and Constance Stamatiou was nominated for Best Female Modern Performance for Alvin Ailey's *Cry*.

Disney's 2023 *The Little Mermaid* created choreography with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater members to serve as the template for live animation in the dynamic "Under the Sea" musical number.

- **Ailey II** celebrated its **50th Anniversary**. Commemorating Ailey II's highly anticipated return to the UK for the first time in over a decade, the Company was photographed in Canterbury Cathedral performing a preview of Ailey's *Revelations*. The photos were selected among the UK's top outlets for "best photo of the day".
- The Ailey/Fordham Bachelor of Fine Arts Program celebrated its **25th anniversary**. Longtime Faculty of The Ailey School, **Ana Marie Forsythe** receives **Dance Teacher's 2024 Awardee of Distinction**, recognized for continuing Lester Horton's legacy and preserving the Horton technique for over five decades.

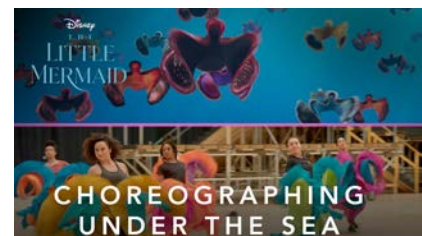
Ailey Extension collaborated with **Noggin** to create and launch **Dance Squad with Ailey**, a series of six on-demand dance videos featuring Paw Patrol character DJ Rubble, the dancing dinosaur Boogie, and Ailey instructor Keith Alexander, encouraging the development of gross motor skills and creative expression through dance. The program is based on dance techniques offered at The Ailey School and Ailey Extension.

AileyCamp Atlanta launches its inaugural partnership with Purpose Built Schools, aligning with Mayor Dickens' *Atlanta Year of the Youth* initiative.

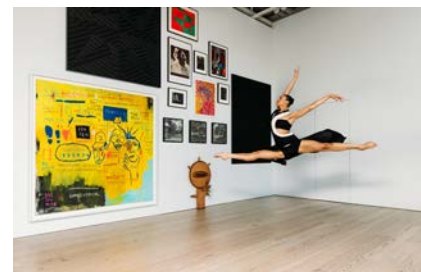
2024– The Whitney Museum opens *Edges of Ailey* on September 25, 2024, the first large-scale museum exhibition to celebrate the life, creativity, influence, and enduring legacy of Alvin Ailey. Through a multimedia display on the museum's fifth floor, paintings, drawings, sculpture, photography, film, rehearsal footage, and archival materials situate Mr. Ailey within a broad social, creative, and cultural context. Through February 5, 2025, *Edges of Ailey* brings together art, history, live performance, music, and new commissions by choreographers influenced by Mr. Ailey to capture the full range of his passions, curiosities, obsessions, and creative output.

- **Portrait of Ailey**, an eight-part docuseries conceived of and directed by Ailey II Artistic Director Emerita Sylvia Waters, launched in February. Available for free on **PBS Learning Media**, *Portrait of Ailey* tells the compelling story of the life, work, and legacy of Alvin Ailey through rare historical film and still images.
- Executive Director **Bennett Rink** is highlighted in Politics NY for being honored in the City & State inaugural **"Arts & Culture Power 100,"** highlighting leaders in New York.
- AILEY partners with **Google Arts & Culture** to share the life and legacy of Alvin Ailey with a larger online audience.
- **AileyDance for Active Aging** received a resolution from the Newark Municipal Council commending AileyDance for Active Aging for its positive health and wellness benefits to the senior community in Newark, New Jersey.

Streaming for free on **PBS KIDS**, *Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum* is an animated adventure-comedy based on Brad Meltzer and Chris Eliopoulos' best-selling kids book series, *Ordinary People Change the World*. The **"I Am Alvin Ailey"** episode explores how music and dance can bring people of all backgrounds together. Each episode follows the adventures of three characters as they travel back in time to meet famous heroes of the past and learn how to be their own heroes of the present.



Click photo above to watch behind the scenes video



BROADCAST HIGHLIGHTS 2024-25 SEASON

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

Dec 4
-Jan 5

New York
City Center



Click on thumbnail images for full videos.

CBS News: Whitney Museum exhibition celebrates life of choreographer Alvin Ailey



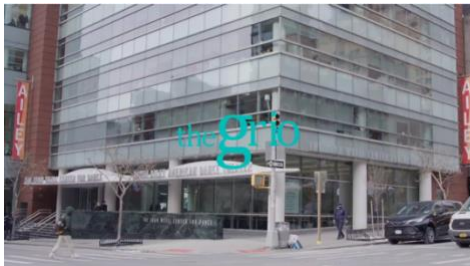
ABC7: Behind the Scenes Look at Ailey's rehearsals for upcoming Holiday Season



ABC7: Judith Jamison, Alvin Ailey Trailblazer, dies at 81



The Grio: AILEY Continues to Mold the next Black Dancers of the Future



NBC News Now: Legacy of Alvin Ailey Lives on at his New York Dance Theater



LIVE Kelly & Mark: Hip Hop with Ailey Extension's Tweet Boogie



NYC Tourism: "The Freedom to Be" ft. Ailey's Yannick Lebrun & Caroline Darthey



Tamron Hall Show: Judith Jamison Says AILEY Doc Gives "Intimate Look" at Ailey's Life



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



NPR Morning Edition: "[A dance about gun violence is touring nationally with Alvin Ailey's company](#)" – February 1, 2024

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AILEY

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

"It isn't really the holiday season in New York City until you've seen Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform"
Town & Country – November 30, 2023

"The world's most exciting dance company bring the house down"
The Telegraph UK, Mark Monahan – September 6, 2023

"Five Stars: extraordinary soul-stirring dance"
The Guardian, Lyndsey Winship – August 24, 2023

"Five Stars: Work that shines... Vibrant showcase of the breadth of dance styles that make Alvin Ailey's company a must-see... It's always a treat when the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is in town, but this year they may have surpassed themselves."
The Stage UK, Siobhan Murphy – September 12, 2023

"Five Stars. The pioneering company's warmth and athletic grace is showcased in a selection of old and new work. There's something generous about Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. It's there in the dancing – full of skill, passion and a charismatic warmth"
The Guardian, Sarah Crompton – September 10, 2023

"Every arts company posts a mission statement – art, community, blah – but few live their values with the blazing commitment of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater... Holds its place in the conversation about race, belief and community in America"
Evening Standard, David Jays – September 6, 2023

"love the company's infectious joie de vivre, alluring sensuality, sinuous musicality. If you need uplift, go see... They are not to be missed."
British Theatre Guide, Vera Liber – September 6, 2023

"A prayer the whole world continues to need – whether from a lone performer or a whole company, the kind of spiritual uplift Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is sure to bring in early February to Miami's Adrienne Arsht Center, notably in its rousing Revelations."
Miami New Times – January 4, 2024

"A wonderfully fresh line-up... The cheers from the audience made clear that the presentation was a crowd-pleaser."
Chicago Sun Times, Kyle MacMillan – April 20, 2024

"... 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

"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

"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

"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

"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

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AILEY

THE REPERTORY

Are You in Your Feelings? by Kyle Abraham

"It's a vibe, complemented by a mixtape of R&B, soul and hip hop tracks and a stunning setting: iridescent separates by costume designer Karen Young and an exquisite backdrop by lighting designer Dan Scully."

Chicago Tribune, Lauren Warnecke – April 18, 2024

"a stunning new piece by Kyle Abraham, *Are You in Your Feelings?* Like Ailey, he fills the stage with a sense of community"

The Guardian, Sarah Crompton – September 10, 2023

"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

The performers' **easy athleticism, passionate musicality and liquid upper-body lyricism** in the Abraham piece are just marvelous..."

The Telegraph UK, Mark Monahan – September 6, 2023

"...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."

The Wall Street Journal, Robert Greskovic – December 13, 2022

CENTURY by Amy Hall Garner

"Garner melded her style with Ailey dancers' brilliant Horton-based technique, sometimes changing rhythms to give their dancing more punch."

Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Cynthia Perry – January 16, 2024

"Suddenly, she is all over the big leagues" "In choosing the music for this moment, she had picked a recording from the Count Basie Orchestra with a title that might have a special resonance for anyone who has been following her career: 'This Could Be the Start of Something Big.'"

The New York Times, Brian Seibert – December 6, 2023 (about Amy Hall Garner)

"Amy Hall Garner's *CENTURY* showed more **staying power,** with its energetic male and female cast of 10 taking inspiration from the accompanying musical selections—seven recorded segments ranging from Count Basie to Duke Ellington—that Ms. Garner chose to honor her grandfather, who was turning 100"

The Wall Street Journal, Robert Greskovic – December 26, 2023

"it's clear that **Garner doesn't merely know a party when she sees one — she knows how to dream one up...** the dancers are clearly committed to a celebration. But Garner adds another element to their flash: **brehtaking speed"**

The New York Times, Gia Kourlas – December 11, 2023

"CENTURY," by the in-demand Amy Hall Garner. Conceived as a birthday gift to her grandfather, who is turning a hundred, the work **is a good-time romp** set to his kind of music—Count Basie, Ray Charles, Louisiana second line."

The New Yorker, Richard Brody – December 15, 2023

"CENTURY, Amy Hall Garner's **joyful new** work... was **a boisterous celebration of life"**

Fjord, Faye Arthurs – December 22, 2023

Cry by 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..."**

The New York Times, Gia Kourlas – December 10, 2015

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AILEY

Dancing Spirit by 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

"From quietly statuesque beginnings to a propulsive, buoyant finale, Brown's creation is **part spiritual, part ritual — physically vibrant and wholly engaging.**"

The Times, Debra Craine – September 7, 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

Following the Subtle Current Upstream by Alonzo King

"What made the dance **mesmerizing** was how natural the performers were, as their movements had a slight improvisational feel."

The Tech, Vivian Hir – May 30, 2024

"True to King's promise, "Current" sure did build to **an ecstatic conclusion.**"

fjord, Faye Arthurs – June 7, 2024

Grace by Ronald K. Brown

"amazingly **explosive image of a spiritual journey.**"

The New York Times

"... his work is a masterful, intensely original mix of hip-hop, African and modern dance styles."

Chicago Sun Times

Me, Myself and You by Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrish

"Accompanied by a recording of Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood," the dance takes form as **a sleek, acrobatic adagio that displays its dancers' limberness**"

The Wall Street Journal, Robert Greskovic – December 26, 2023

"As if it is a portal from another world, James Gilmer seems to enter through the mirror like mist, swooping in just in time to catch Dartey as she, again, extends a leg into the air and falls into his arms."

The New York Times, Gia Kourlas – December 11, 2023

Memoria by Alvin Ailey

"When the company performed *Memoria* in its entirety, the layered masses of the finale displayed **outstanding musicality and a unity so startling it was hard to believe one's eyes.** Those young people from the Ailey School were **amazingly polished.**"

The Dance Enthusiast, Robert Johnson – January 29, 2024

"*Memoria* exerts a special fascination. Surely the opening section is **one of the most transcendent pieces** in the modern dance repertoire, thanks to its remarkable structure."

The Dance Enthusiast, Robert Johnson – January 29, 2024

Night Creature by Alvin Ailey

"Night Creature" (1941, to Duke Ellington) is an old friend, it always takes me by surprise when it introduces Cuban hip motion – **a joy, since the Ailey 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 Ailey dancers look wholly at home in every part.**"

The New York Times, Alastair Macaulay – December 13, 2018

Ode by Jamar Roberts

"**Storytelling was paramount...** as the act unfurled to tell **a tender tale of beauty and togetherness** interrupted by pain and isolation in a "time of growing gun violence,"

The Harvard Crimson, Stella A, Gilbert – May 5, 2024

"... **a powerful and poetic exploration** of the effects of gun violence..."

The New York Times, Gia Kourlas – December 24, 2019

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AILEY

“...*Ode* validates the decision to make him the troupe’s first resident choreographer. He clearly has things to say and a fresh way of saying them. His emotions and his musicality are hooked up in a distinctive, quietly persuasive fashion. In *Ode* his sensuous, full-bodied choreography is anchored in the music at a deep enough level that it’s free to flow over the surface in its own form, slowing and speeding and sometimes maintaining two tempos at once.”

The New York Times, Brian Seibert – December 11, 2019

Revelations by Alvin Ailey

“Ailey’s legendary *Revelations*, still hugely powerful after 65 years, alongside the modern pieces of precision and fire.”

The Guardian, Lyndsey Winship – August 24, 2023

“a riveting performance of Ailey’s signature *Revelations*, which brought the crowd to their feet for a long-lasting standing ovation”

VOGUE, Kiana Murden – November 30, 2023

“... 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

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

The New York Times, Brian Seibert – December 18, 2020

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

The New Yorker, Marina Harss – December 7, 2020

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

Town & Country, Kibwe Chase-Marshall – September 2020 issue

“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...”

The New York Times, Alastair Macaulay – December 5, 2014

Solo (Hans van Manen)

“Manen’s humor was evident from the get-go, considering that *Solo* was actually a trio... funny yet technically challenging frolic.”

fjord, Faye Arthurs – June 7, 2024

“*Solo* (1997), a lively, technically demanding classic by now 91-year-old Dutch choreographer Hans van Manen... The tightly crafted work, which perfectly fits the music by Johann Sebastian Bach.”

Chicago Sun Times, Kyle MacMillan – April 20, 2024

“a new production of *Solo* by Hans van Manen that made the speed and virtuosity of Chalvar Monteiro, Yannick Lebrun and Patrick Coker priorities.”

The New York Times, Gia Kourlas – December 11, 2023

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AILEY

Treading by Alvin Ailey

"Treading gives lovers of fine dancing much to marvel at."
The New York Times, Jack Anderson

THE DANCERS

"Yet the glorious virtuosity of the dancing means that each evening never disappoints. The dancers seem to have a unique ability to move forwards and backwards at the same time, movement flowing through their bodies with astonishing grace."

The Guardian, Sarah Crompton – September 17, 2023

"its sterling group of dancers remains primed for whatever will be asked of it."

The Wall Street Journal, Robert Greskovic – December 26, 2023

"It's almost impossible not to love the dancers at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT), such is their stage presence, their infectious joy in dancing, and their total commitment to their art."

Ballet 2000, Gerald Dowler – November 2023

"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

"Stamatiou is an outstanding dancer and presence on stage, though equally matched in both dance quality and charisma, by Yannick Lebrun. **It's unlikely that anyone could consistently divert their eyes away from Lebrun for more than a swift second, his mellifluous movement style combined with his magnetism:** a recipe for instant and lasting appeal."

Bachtrack, Deborah Weiss – September 8, 2023

"As arresting as all the dancers were, I was especially moved by Constance Stamatiou's shining, richly elegiac performance. She danced with sparkling clarity and a sureness of strength. At the same time, she was unafraid to explore the ultimate length and depth of every move she made. **Stamatiou was in one word hypnotic."**

The Ballet Herald, Jillian Verzwylt – March 27, 2024 (in reference to *Dancing Spirit*)

"The three dancers — Shawn Cusseaux, Yannick Lebrun and Chalvar Monteiro — were nothing short of superb, bringing ample doses of alacrity, dexterity, agility and zest to everything they did."

Chicago Sun Times, Kyle MacMillan – April 20 (in reference to *Solo*)

"... 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)

"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

"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 dancer of absorbing, unaffected ebullience no matter the role... springs up and down from the floor with so little concern for gravity that she seems more spirit than person"

The New York Times, Gia Kourlas – December 11, 2023

"Ashley Kaylynn Green — a powerhouse..."

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*)

"Jamison's lifeforce continues to be felt in the Ailey company and pulses through soloist Hannah Alissa Richardson's torso and out through her fingertips in *Dancing Spirit's* most literal reference to her legacy."

Chicago Tribune, Lauren Warnecke – April 18, 2024

"Isaiah Day, an eye-catching newcomer...gave noteworthy performances, becoming, for instance, a kind of celestial athlete in another of the season's revivals, Alonzo King's *Following the Subtle Current Upstream*"

The Wall Street Journal, Robert Greskovic – December 26, 2023

The New York Times

A Muse and a Leader Embodied Power and Poise

By: Gia Kourlas

November 13, 2024

GIA KOURLAS | AN APPRAISAL

A Muse and a Leader With Vigor and Poise

THE OVATION LASTED for almost 10 minutes. The solo that prompted it was only six minutes longer.

Before the premiere of Alvin Ailey's "Cry" in 1971, Judith Jamison was hardly an unknown quantity. But after it, she was a singular sensation, a headliner, the embodiment of poise and power. From then on she was unofficially America's most celebrated Black female dancer — maybe even the world's.

Jamison, who died on Saturday at 81, owned every room she walked into. She was alive from every angle, a force of three-dimensional expression. In all of her dancing there was her electrifying body, long and tall, the image of towering dignity. Her stature was imposing, but she was pliant, too — a container of sensations. She could move.

"Cry," a solo in which a dancer explores a woman's path from slavery and loss to a state of grace, was her signature role. Ailey dedicated it to "all Black women everywhere — especially our mothers," and in it Jamison was a rapturous pillar of strength and sorrow.

CONTINUED ON PAGE C4

Judith Jamison, an image of towering dignity, was a star of Alvin Ailey's dance company as a dancer and then as its artistic director.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

After the costume she was meant to wear in "Cry" was deemed unsuitable at the last minute, two leotards were combined to add extra material to the sleeves. That's how long her arms were. In motion, they seemed to grow out of her back like willowy branches reaching longer and longer still, as if daring to touch the sun.

A film from a 1972 gala shows Jamison in the second section of "Cry," set to Laura Nyro's "Been on a Train." As she spins across the floor, her arms are propellers guiding her spiraling torso. There is a pause in the music, and Jamison quiets, too, dropping an arm in resignation before descending to the floor in a slow-motion contraction. Later, to the lyric, "there's nothing left to say or do," Jamison, seated, parts her legs, rocking her torso in tiny circles. She reaches, her fingers splayed and delivers the cry of the title — a silent scream, inspired by a photograph in Life magazine of a woman with a baby during the Biafran War.

The way emotion seeps into her dancing, even on video, is searing. It's not pasted on, it's not separate from her physicality. The power of that impulsiveness makes it seem as if she could reach for feelings deep inside her body and urge them past her skin to unfurl into the world.

Jamison was Ailey's muse, as complicated as that word is, and she was able to bring his feelings, his ideas to life because of who she was. "It is a face born to cry the blues," Clive Barnes wrote in The Times, when she premiered in "Cry." "But when she smiles it is with an innocent radiance, a joyfulness that is simple and lovely."

But that didn't mean that the choreographic process for "Cry" was simple, or that the dance was one note. There was, between Ailey and Jamison, some heat, some tension — a relationship, writes Jennifer Dunning in her Ailey biography, of both love



JACK MITCHELL/ALVIN AILEY DANCE FOUNDATION, INC., VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

and hate. During the eight-day creation of "Cry," Dunning writes, "There were battles of will between the two, who were both dieting hard and working under the gun to get the dance done quickly."

Jamison left Ailey for Broadway in 1980, and formed her own group, the Jamison

Judith Jamison in Alvin Ailey's "Cry," which premiered in 1971. The work was Jamison's signature role.

Project, in 1988. After Alvin Ailey died, in 1989, she stepped into the artistic directorship of the company. It was natural that the muse became the leader, the guiding light, because as a muse she was a leader, too: building dances, right alongside Ailey, with her body and mind.

It's difficult to wrap my head around the timing of her death. It's a loss that mingles with the disappointment, exhaustion and anger that so many Black women feel in the wake of Kamala Harris's loss in the presidential election. The first section of "Cry," Jamison explained in a video about the work, was "about how much we are carrying as Black women. How much we are celebrated or not celebrated as queens. How hard we work."

Jamison carried a lot. As Ailey's artistic director for 21 years, she helped to make the company into something bigger than dance, just as she, in a way, was bigger than dance. The Ailey company is thriving, with a prized place in culture, but to get it there must have required some personal sacrifice from Jamison, including her own independent dance career.

But Jamison was real, too. Ralph Lemon, the choreographer and visual artist, got to know her when she was teaching at Jacob's Pillow in the late 1980s. "I have such a clear picture of her driving around the Pillow in her Jeep and wearing overalls," he said in an email. She seemed happy and free: "It was a wonderful counterpoint to the image I had of her prior," he wrote, "her more goddess-like iconic presence in the Ailey universe."

What a snapshot! You can almost see that smile, too, radiant and alive.

Alive from every angle, a force of three-dimensional expression.

The New York Times

Works Inspired By Wonders

By: Holland Cotter

September 26, 2024

HOLLAND COTTER | ART REVIEW

Works Inspired By Wonders

A tribute to the choreographer Alvin Ailey features paintings, sculptures and music.

WITH THE POWERHOUSE, sense-surround show “Edges of Ailey” at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the New York art season gets off to an exuberant, enveloping, though puzzling start.

The show is a major institutional tribute to the American choreographer and performer Alvin Ailey (1931-1989). It’s also a relatively rare example of a traditionally object-intensive art museum giving full-scale treatment to the ephemeral medium of dance.

But if you anticipated, as I did, that this would mean a display of documentary photographs, some archival materials (costumes, stage designs), and — best — extensive examples of dance on film, you’ve got a surprise in store.

“Modern dance seemed to encapsulate all of my ideas,” Ailey said in a 1984 interview. “There was movement, there was color, there was painting, there was sculpture, and there was the putting it all together.”

The show takes Ailey at his word. It’s the

Edges of Ailey
Whitney Museum
of American Art



HIBERO MASLIKE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Center top, Jennifer Packer’s “Not Yet Titled” (2024); bottom, from left, John Outterbridge’s “The Elder, Ethnic Heritage Series” (1971-72); Eldren Bailey’s “Dancers” (1960s); and Richmond Barthé’s “African Dancer” (1933), all part of the “Edges of Ailey” exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

"all" he speaks of that's here. On the Whitney's fifth floor you enter a wide-open gallery dominated by an 18-channel video montage of flickering bodies and talking heads. But it serves as a kind of audiovisual backdrop to many dozens of objects — paintings, sculptures, collages, prints — rich in imaginative variety, diverse in content, and many with no immediate connection to Ailey. Which is where puzzlement sets in: How "Ailey" is the show? And, for that matter, how much about dance?

The Whitney organizers — Adrienne Edwards, senior curator and associate director of curatorial programs; Joshua Lubin-Levy, a curatorial research associate and scholar of photography and performance; and C J Salapare, a curatorial assistant — have clearly anticipated these questions. And they've addressed them by organizing

Edges of Ailey

Through Feb. 9 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan; 212-570-3600, whitney.org. During the run there will be more than 90 live dance events in the museum's third-floor theater, as well as classes, workshops and talks.

a kind of parallel show, this one on the museum's third floor: a program of live performances by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and an impressive roster of guest artists to be presented throughout the exhibition's run.

What you get in the fifth-floor gallery — which is what most visitors will see — is something different, formally more static, but still dynamic. Basically, it's an evocation of Ailey, and his dance, through the lens of African American visual art, which is a record and reflection of the Black culture that shaped him, and that he helped shape.

Dance was and is part of that culture, and images of it come right upfront in an introductory display, notably sculptures of widely varying styles and dates: Richmond Barthé's classic, ecstatic "African Dancer" from 1933 is here; so is an image of a jitterbugging couple molded from raw concrete in the 1960s by Eldren M. Bailey, a self-taught cemetery sculptor from Georgia; and there's a 1976 abstract work by the American artist Senga Nengudi. Made of nylon pantyhose mesh filled with sand, it was designed to be manipulated in performances, and, as seen in a photograph, suggests a dancer stretching at the barre.

There are also dance-themed paintings. Two by the much-watched figurative artists Jennifer Packer and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, were produced expressly for the show. A scribbly little black oil stick drawing by the artist-choreographer Ralph Lemon titled "Alvin Ailey Dancing Revelations #3" might easily have been a commission too, but dates from 1999.

From this introductory point, which follows a winding path through a series of island-like displays, the exhibition takes on a broadly biographical cast, with work that evokes Ailey's personal history, what he called his "blood memories."

To someone born, as Ailey was, into a line of sharecroppers in rural Texas, the sculptures here of the Southern artist Beverly Buchanan, in the form of miniature shacks pieced together from scrap wood, might not look entirely fanciful. And to someone immersed early in the Black church — as Ailey was, his signature dance "Revelations" came from it — with its exhortative sonories and Afro-Caribbean overlays, neither the image of a heaven-pointing preacher in a painting by Benny Andrews, nor the presence of a pair of Fon ritual drums, would have felt foreign.

Ailey was raised by his mother — his father left them early on — and her constant quest for employment and safety had them moving around a lot. In the 1940s, they joined the Great Migration out of the rural South. Three smokey-dark, tangled-line paintings of crowds by the self-taught artist Purvis Young, along with Martin Puryear's bronze sculpture, "The Rest," in the shape of a handcart, evoke that exodus.

Mother and son settled in Los Angeles, where Ailey thrived as a museum-going, notebook-keeping gay kid mesmerized by theater, and particularly by modern dance after seeing performances by the Black choreographer Katherine Dunham and meeting, in high school, his close friend and future dance partner Carmen de Lavallade. Both women are present as portraits in a section of the show devoted to images of Black women who influenced Ailey early and late.

The show's idea of using art to demonstrate the personal and cultural influences that made Ailey the artist he was works better in some applications than in others. I don't usually think of his dances — apart from a few pieces like "Masekela Language" — as political in the activist way that



PHOTOGRAPHS BY HERB R. MASURK/THE NEW YORK TIMES



Top left, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's "Fly Trap" (2024). Top right, a block of the AIDS Memorial Quilt (1987) with a panel for Ailey at top right. Above, Charles White's "Preacher" (1952), left, and Benny Andrews's "The Way to the Promised Land" (1994) at right. From left, Geoffrey Holder's "Portrait of Carmen de Lavallade" (1976), Beauford Delaney's "Marian Anderson" (1965) and Lois Mailou Jones's "Jennie" (1943). Below, Maren Hassinger's "River" (1972/2012).

the show's "Black Liberation" section defines that. But the grouping of work devoted to the theme of "Black Music" seems right on point.

Music — from Ralph Vaughan Williams, to Mahalia Jackson, to Laura Nyro — was the engine that drove Ailey's dance. It's everywhere here. It's in the air thanks to the eclectic score for the mural-like video piece by Kya Lou and Josh Begley, filmmakers who worked with Edwards, the curator. And it's in individual works in the "Black Music" section, with their references to Charlie Parker (in a painting by Beauford Delaney), to Billie Holiday and Nina Simone (in a sculpture by Charles Gaines), and to the pantheon of Black blues and soul luminaries named in Kerry James Marshall's 1998 "Souvenir IV."

Marshall's grandly scaled grisaille painting, a lament for — and shout out to — musicians lost, is just a plain wonderful thing, an outstanding entry in a show that has many. Others include Clementine Hunter's painting of a white-robed Louisiana river baptism; Wadsworth Jarrell's sizzling pointillist portrait of Angela Davis; David Hammons's dark-star explosion of a sculpture made from wire, plastic beads and human hair; and, concluding the show, a monumental excerpt from the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt with the panel commemorating Ailey, who died at 58 as a result of the disease.

So the exhibition on the Whitney's fifth floor gives you a lot: an atmospheric soak in cultural history, insight into a creative life (examples of Ailey's voluminous writings — letters, stories, choreographic notes-to-self — are installed throughout), and some terrific art. But what it doesn't give you is sustained in-motion images of dance. You only see Ailey dance in peripheral ways — in quick clips in the video montage and on small screens in a small space outside the main installation.

But there are ways, even in a traditional museum setting, to get dance on the main stage, to make it part of the fixed format of an object-based show. In the treasurable exhibition called "Merce Cunningham: Common Time," at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2017, the galleries were devoted primarily to Merce-related objects. But certain walls were left clear and used as big screens on which performance film were projected. Benches were set up. You could, if you wanted to, and had time — and I did — see long, unbroken portions of Cunningham dances, which gave everything else in the show a living context, an aesthetic utility.

I've visited "Edges of Ailey" twice, and lingered both times. I love the look of it, the sound of it, the ideas it floats. But I miss the element that gives all brilliant dance-makers their edge, the one that counts: dance itself. For that, I look forward to sampling the rest of the show, its performance program, in the months ahead.



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Exhibition Review: **Alvin Ailey's Art On Sprawling Display**

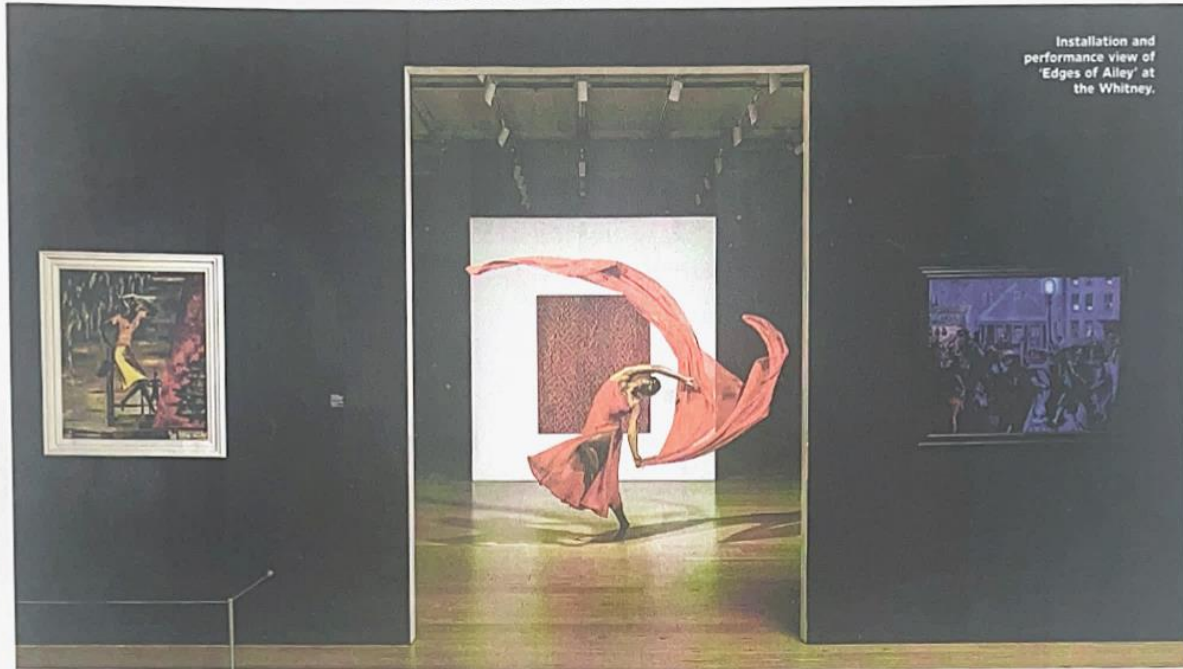
By: Robert Greskovic

October 9, 2024

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Thursday, October 10, 2024 | A11 7

ARTS IN REVIEW



Installation and performance view of 'Edges of Ailey' at the Whitney.

By ROBERT GRESKOVIC

New York

"EDGES OF AILEY," curated by Adrienne Edwards with assistance from Joshua Lubin-Levy and CJ Salapare, which runs through Feb. 9, 2025, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, mates a full-floor, 18,000-square-foot gallery display with a program of over 90 live dance performances, classes and talks presented two floors below in the museum's intimate theater. Its subject is the life, art and what its promotional materials call "adjacencies" of dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey (1931-1989), whose career in modern dance led him to international renown.

The gallery installation includes more than 290 artworks by over 80 artists chosen to position them in aesthetic relationship to Ailey, as well as over 150 pieces of ephemera, mostly shown on the perimeter of the space, where they amount to a sprawling scrapbook featuring handwritten pages of Ailey's journal-like jottings and ruminations, as well as family snapshots and photographs, some documenting Ailey's performing days. Streaming above all this is a frieze-like loop of audio and visual projections that make for a large-scale, animated, upper-story element of performance excerpts and talking heads culled from recordings of Ailey's life and works.

This 18-screen expanse reveals sometimes grainy footage with often fuzzy audio that makes it



Ailey circa 1960, two years after he founded his company.

tricky to focus on those speaking amid the gallery's ambient sounds. "I'm Alvin Ailey. I'm a choreographer. I'm a Black man whose roots are in the sun and the dirt of the South," for instance, can be heard in passing if one can home in on Ailey's mellow, delicately resonant voice, but those words are better conveyed as a heading for the "Southern Imaginary" wall label.

Ailey's life as a gay man is doc-

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Alvin Ailey's Art On Sprawling Display

The Whitney devotes a show to the renowned American choreographer

umented here through the loose leaves of his displayed writings and grouped into the show's "Black Liberation (Queerness)" section. No related sound bites exist from his on-camera interviews, where his private life remained private as, arguably, the times demanded.

Given their number and often large-scale dimensions, the paintings, sculpture and artifacts—all categorized by headers that range from "Blackness in Dance" to "Ailey's Influences"—dominate the space. There are not only big-name visual artists, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kara Walker,

but—for me—unfamiliar ones. And while the paintings, in general, can often feel more incidental than integral to the performing art that Ailey practiced, I found those of the self-taught Purvis Young (1943-2010) most affecting—at once raw of touch and delicate of color, making for painterly blends offering naïf figures and atmospheric cityscapes.

Museum-goers familiar with the eagerly attended December

seasons of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at City Center—this year's will run from Dec. 4 through January 2025—might wonder why Ailey's ever-popular 1960 dance suite "Revelations," created two years after he founded his company, and set to spirituals and gospel music, isn't as prominent here. While this, the troupe's signature work, closes nearly every one of the company's programs at City Center, signs of it are fleeting in the Whitney's displays.

One of them comes in a vitrine at the left end of the gallery, where it should not be missed. It's a modestly presented, slightly creased Kaufmann Concert Hall program from the dance's premiere year, when its three parts included 16 numbers; today's now-standard 3-part structure features 11.

Some years ago, Sylvia Waters, a veteran AAADT dancer and the first artistic director of Ailey II, AAADT's second company, spoke of Ailey's basic interest in his dancers' abilities: "Alvin wanted a ballet bottom and a modern top," she noted, meaning he preferred his dancers to have strong, limber and articulate legs and feet, complemented by a flexible and dynamic torso and arms.

The Whitney's performance component began last month. I caught one bill, called "Harmonic

Echo," danced by Ailey II. Its 4-part program offered excerpts from three Ailey dances, plus one by Judith Jamison, who over her long career had been a stellar Ailey dancer and the first artistic director of AAADT following Ailey's death.

The approximately half-hour presentation was danced with authority and ease, with each featured man and woman projecting strength and confidence throughout. It was a special pleasure to see these impressively trained dancers up close, framed within the confines of the Whitney's 109-capacity venue. Theatrical rewards from the stylish and economic means that Ailey deftly employed with simple costuming and props held sway—a neck scarf or a fringed shawl establishing character, or a stool indicating place.

Alvin Ailey died of AIDS-related complications at age 58, having made his last dance in 1988, the year before his death. The nearly year-by-year chronology in the show's hefty and profusely illustrated 388-page catalog continues beyond 1989 with four select years to note significant publications—a 1996 biography and a 1997 dissertation on Ailey's choreography—and special honors that have sustained Ailey's legacy.

"Edges of Ailey" sometimes keeps the man and his art at the physical edges of this expansive exhibition, but even when the show's related artworks tower in size and shape, dominating the gallery's expanse, they do so as Alvin Ailey's spirit accumulates all around them.

Edges of Ailey
Whitney Museum of American Art, through Feb. 9, 2025

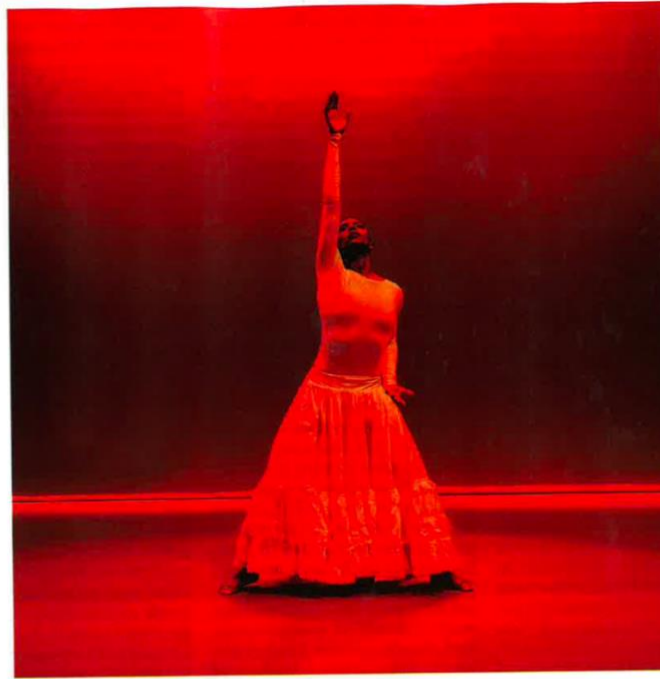
Mr. Greskovic writes about dance for the Journal.

ALVIN AILEY: JAMES HAMILTON; AILEY II: JAMES HAMILTON

THE
NEW YORKER
The House That Alvin Ailey Built

By: Hilton Als
October 21, 2024 Print Issue

THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE IMPRESARIO

Alvin Ailey's crusade to build a home for himself and other Black dancers.

BY HILTON ALS

In 1960, the twenty-nine-year-old Alvin Ailey premiered his landmark work, "Revelations," with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, the company he'd founded to showcase Black culture through dance. This marked the end of his apprenticeship as a young choreographer who'd grown up revering Katherine Dunham, Les-

ter Horton, Martha Graham, and Jack Cole—American masters with an international perspective. It also launched him into critical purgatory.

From the start, the thirty-six-minute piece, which depicts Black resilience and Christian faith, and is set to various spirituals, was a hit with audiences, both because of Ailey's preternatural talent for

constructing graphic stage pictures and because it took us to church without our having to go to church. You do not need to have been raised in the South, as Ailey was, or to have attended Baptist services, as he did with his mother, in order to understand what he is doing here, particularly in the final section of the piece, set to the triumphant "Wade in the

Samantha Figgins rehearsing Ailey's piece "Cry" at the Whitney Museum, in September.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DIANA MARKOSIAN

THE NEW YORKER, OCTOBER 21, 2024

57

Water." The dancers, clad in light colors, step high, their backs straight and heads held high, as they walk across baptismal waters toward their own glory. (Stretches of fluttering fabric simulate the water, an effect that Ailey, a magpie by nature, no doubt borrowed from Jerome Robbins, who did something similar to create a river in "The King and I," in 1951.) But what you are watching is not just a parade of "vertical saints," as James Baldwin described his church-going brethren, but the work of a choreographer who aims to show us how the metaphysical moves.

In "Revelations," Ailey turns away from Martha Graham's anxious world of men and women and myth, from George Balanchine's plotless ballets, and from Merce Cunningham's brilliant abstract explorations of the body. Here and in his subsequent work, Ailey tells a different story, one in which the music, the Black dancers' inner lives, and the choreographer's memories are the narrative. This shift was especially potent—vital—at a time when the Civil Rights Act was still four years away and activists and protesters were being beaten and burned to death. Without pandering to white tastes or shutting white people out, "Revelations" is resolute in its insistence on portraying Black life and community. The only stage performance from that time that is remotely analogous to "Revelations" is Lorraine Hansberry's play "A Raisin in the Sun" (1959)—the story of a Black family that doesn't give up, a story for all families.

After "Revelations," Ailey continued working for almost three decades—until his death, in 1989—choreographing more than seventy dances. You can see some of them live or in archival footage or photographs, and in dialogue with art that Adrienne Edwards, the protean senior curator and director of curatorial programs at the Whitney Museum of American Art, has gathered, in "Edges of Ailey," the largest and most comprehensive examination of Ailey's life, work, influences, and inspirations ever assembled. On the museum's eighteen-thousand-square-foot fifth floor are works by eighty-two artists, including Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Lorna Simpson, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Romare Bearden, and Alma Thomas, which illustrate and intersect with Ailey's themes. There are

videos of historic performances, and live stagings by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and Ailey II in the third-floor theatre. It took Edwards six and a half years to put the show together, but, as she told me this summer, it was a lifetime in the making.

Every curator is a storyteller. And the story that Edwards aims to tell in "Edges of Ailey" is that of Ailey's many permutations and trajectories—his desire to keep moving forward as a dancer, a choreographer, a teacher, a writer. In the process, she reveals him to have been more culturally important than he is generally given credit for being. Edwards relied greatly on Ailey's voluminous notebooks and diaries to chart his story, which could not be recounted in a linear way. "What I could do," she told me, "was relate to things that I found to be illuminating about him, trying to get into a headspace of what it would be like to be a gay man in the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties, especially during this moment in his life where you're founding this thing and coming of age." Edwards sees Ailey's literary, theatrical, and intellectual loves as a form of company. In his notebooks, we see him planning and imagining possible projects: a ballet inspired by the life and work of Hart Crane, say, or an exploration of the genius of Federico García Lorca, or of Tennessee Williams—all queer artists who don't directly appear in Ailey's dances but who formed a kind of brotherhood in his mind. A lifelong autodidact, he had a deep admiration for writers who were able to speak of their queerness, at least through metaphor. The ultimate metaphor for Ailey was the body, and his work was the language with which to articulate it.

In Ailey's career, "Revelations" was both a blessing and a curse: a blessing because it kept audiences coming back, and a curse because his subsequent attempts to push against the perimeters of dance—or, more specifically, Black dance—were often measured against that masterpiece and found wanting. Arlene Croce, in her review, in this magazine, of Ailey's winter 1974 season at City Center—which included "Revelations" and "Masekela Langage" (1969), a work set to the music of the South African composer Hugh Mase-

kela which addresses apartheid—expresses her frustration with Ailey, with his tendency, as she writes, to be "remarkably consistent in trying to capitalize on 'Revelations' as if it were a formula success." She goes on:

The Ailey company is . . . loading up on religious and secular song suites, feeding its audience with a particular kind of material when all that matters is how that material—or any material—is assembled. With musicals slipping badly in recent years, the Ailey has been drawing a lot of people who think of it as a higher substitute for Broadway. They find what they are looking for in only one piece. It doesn't take them long to discover that "Revelations" is the higher substitute for the Ailey.

Joan Acocella, also writing here, nearly forty years later, observed:

The dancers of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre are thrilling, and the dances they do are mostly sentimental and conventional. There are exceptions, notably the company's signature work, "Revelations." . . . This piece is relentlessly programmed by the Ailey troupe. During the present season . . . it closes nearly two-thirds of the performances. The spectators wouldn't have it any other way. They clap along; they vocalize. At the end, they jump to their feet and shout, and demand an encore (which they get).

In both reviews, it's the "they" that concerns me; there's a whole lot of othering going on, like when white people ask why Black people talk to the screen so much during a movie. There's also the assumption that a work this popular must be easy. Judith Jamison, Ailey's great star, made this mistake, too. When she first saw the company rehearsing "Revelations," in 1963, she said, "Oh, I can do that!" Later, as she writes in her autobiography, "Dancing Spirit," she changed her tune: "Guess what? You try it sometime. The dancers made the movement look easy. It's not. It takes unbelievable coordination. It takes passion, commitment, dedication, and love to know that every step you do should be infused with 100 percent of yourself."

The dance world has always been a segregated place, divided as much by class as by European cultural history. Ailey was an uneven choreographer, for sure, but what he wanted to promote with his company was the idea that Black audiences—general Black audiences, like the folks Acocella probably saw applauding "Revelations"—

should connect not only with their "biked" and "scorned" selves onstage but with the feeling that performance can be a kind of balm, an embrace.

"Revelations" grew in part out of memories—of the people who made up Ailey's community, and thus of Ailey himself. He was born in 1931. His birthplace: a little Texas town called Rogers, between Austin and Waco. This is the territory you'll find in a Katherine Anne Porter story—"He" (1927), say, or "Noon Wine" (1937)—a world that consists of hard earth and mean poverty, a world where Jim Crow is a defining factor. And so is Jesus. Ailey's parents, Alvin, Sr., and the beautiful and theatrical Lula, met in church and married when Lula was fourteen. Four years later, their only child was born, but the marriage wasn't working. When Alvin was three months old, his father took off. Then he returned. He was feckless. "He just didn't have the education to take care of a family," Lula says in Jennifer Dunning's rich biography "Alvin Ailey: A Life in Dance" (1996). When Lula expressed her discontent to her father, he told her to stay married; nevertheless, Lula used her sharecropper's wages to buy train tickets that got her and her son about a hundred and fifty miles away, to Wharton, where Lula picked cotton for a time, accompanied, on occasion, by Alvin. These were years of closeness, of Lula sharing stories from books that she bought on the cheap, and Alvin showing her a house that he dreamed of living in. There was also violence. As Ailey recounts in his autobiography, "Revelations," which was published posthumously, in 1995:

When I was about five years old, my mother was raped by four white men. She never admitted to me that it happened. She only recently found out that I knew about it. One night she didn't come home until ten P.M. She usually came home at three or four in the afternoon. She probably had been working in some white people's kitchen. That was the other kind of work, along with picking cotton, available to black people. It was very clear to me that my mother was crying. She had bruises all over her body. I don't think she ever told anyone about it except maybe her sisters or friends from church.

Violence can beget violence. The rage that was burned into Lula's skin—the



rage of poverty and abuse—was sometimes turned on Alvin. He recalls in his book that when Lula drank she'd beat him. Alvin's tears when that happened were evidence not only of physical hurt but of longing: a longing to express how it feels to be wounded, to be loveless. Lula did love him, though, and it showed in all the menial jobs and the small and big humiliations that she endured to support him.

In 1936, she saw a newspaper ad for a job preparing meals for a highway crew eighty miles away, in Navasota. While the five-year-old Alvin stayed with a relative in Wharton, she secured the job, and also found romance with Amos Alexander, a churchgoing Black businessman who was well respected by both Black and white townspeople. Eventually, Lula and Alvin went to live in Alexander's house.

When Ailey writes, in his autobiography, about his gratitude for the stability of that home and his love for Alexander, who became like a father to him, he seems to rest in a kind of languid joy—the same emotion that one sees and feels at times when watching "Revelations," which is presented partly from a child's perspective, particularly in the last section, set on the Sabbath. A big Texas sun shines down on a congregation. Church ladies, sitting on stools in their Sunday best, wave their fans

and nod in acknowledgment. These "correct" ladies are joined by their Christian brothers, gentlemen in smart vests, who are a willing, proud audience to the women as they get the spirit and cast off the trials and tribulations of the week. In "Revelations," Ailey glorifies not only the female body, which most choreographers do, but also the male body, and, more specifically, the Black male dancer, who moves differently onstage than, say, a dancer like Baryshnikov (an Ailey admirer, who appeared in his 1976 piece "Pas de Duke" with Judith Jamison). You can feel that the spotlight is often on the men in Ailey's work, and his early queer experiences clearly play a part in his artistic story.

In his book, Ailey talks about a twelve-year-old named Chauncey, his best friend when he was eight, and how, one summer afternoon, he and Chauncey were playing by a water tank behind Alexander's house. It "must have been twenty feet deep," Ailey writes, "and very slick at the edges."

On one of those hot days I fell into the tank and almost drowned. Chauncey saved my life. I went under the water three times, thrashing my arms and gasping for air, before Chauncey pulled me out. . . . Chauncey managed to push all the water out of me. As he pushed the water, he also lay on top of me. He thought it was fun to lie on me and make what amounted to sexual movements. I guess I became a kind of sexual object for Chauncey. I didn't mind, but

he introduced me to passivity, to being a kind of sexual object for an older guy.

Part of what's touching about Ailey's book is the questioning way in which he tries to define himself through language. One wonders if he wrote it in order to tell Lula who he was—the way Tennessee Williams used "The Glass Menagerie" to describe aspects of his own family and his place in it.

Family—the stability that Alexander offered—wasn't enough for Lula; her ambition kept her on the move. In late 1941, she heard about more lucrative work in California; she soon got herself to Los Angeles, while Alvin stayed behind to finish out the school year. When he arrived at Union Station, in L.A., his mother noticed that he was carrying a stained paper bag and asked what it was. It was the lunch he'd been given for the trip, he said. He'd saved some of it for her, in case she was hungry.

At first, dancing was something that Ailey did by himself, for himself, inspired by performers he loved watching onscreen: Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly. Although he and Lula were now living in the city where those movies were made, he didn't think of dancing as something that he could do professionally. "You were a sissy (*sissy* was a big word back then) if you danced," he writes. He *was* a sissy. One Halloween, when he was fifteen, he dressed up in drag; he also hung out with a group of boys who traded sex with an older man for beer and money. But he didn't get caught up in that. Culture offered more freedom. As a matter of fact, writing poetry was an escape from the raw sexuality that he overheard at home, the sounds of Lula and her second husband, Fred W. Cooper—a "navy man"—making love in their small apartment in segregated South Central Los Angeles. Another form of escape was seeing shows on Central Avenue, the street he took to and from the primarily Black Thomas Jefferson High School.

Back in the forties and fifties, on Central Avenue, which was known as Little Harlem, you could catch great performances by Pigmear Markham, Lena Horne, and Katherine Dunham's dance

troupe. Dunham, who was trained as an anthropologist, had studied and lived in Haiti and elsewhere in the Caribbean; realizing that you could go out into the world and bring back alternate vocabularies about the Black experience had an enormous effect on Ailey. Dunham became, in time, a kind of spiritual mother to him—a forerunner in his fight to establish a school where Black dance idioms could be studied.

Carmen de Lavallade, one of Ailey's gymnastics classmates in high school, had always danced; her cousin Janet Collins, whom she revered, had danced for Dunham and was the first Black prima ballerina with the Metropolitan Opera. Forward-thinking, even pre-

scient, de Lavallade knew talent—knew possibility—when she saw it, and in Ailey she saw a dancer who needed making. One afternoon, she took him to the Lester Horton Dance Theatre, in Hollywood, where she studied. For Horton, the company was a kind of family. His dancers didn't just dance; they worked on costumes, lighting, and sets together, building the atmospheres for their dances. There was little money, and the company, which was racially mixed, had to deal with segregation when touring, but the dancers knew that what Horton was offering—a total-theatre approach—would round them out as performers. Ailey studied many genres of dance with Horton, but he still had some ambivalence about being a "sissy" dancer. After high school, he attended U.C.L.A. and later San Francisco State College, studying Romance languages and intermittently dancing with Horton. In 1953, at the age of twenty-two, he returned to Horton full time.

Horton encouraged Ailey to start making his own dances, and after Horton died, from a heart attack, later that year, Ailey became the company's choreographer. At first, his work felt derivative, to him and to de Lavallade, who was now a lead dancer. "When I started doing choreography, I was Lester all over again—Lester reincarnated," Ailey writes in "Revelations." Who were Ailey and de Lavallade without their mentor's vision? But others saw their worth, these two young performers at the height of their

beauty, fluent in styles ranging from ballet to Caribbean-influenced modernism, performers who oozed sensuality and grace whenever they crossed the stage.

One of the producers of Truman Capote and Harold Arlen's musical, "House of Flowers," a story of young love set amid rival bordellos in Haiti, saw the pair perform at Jacob's Pillow in 1954, and asked them to move to New York and join the cast. Soon after Ailey and de Lavallade arrived in New York, the show's choreographer, Herbert Ross, added a dance for them, and it brought the house down. Their work was not singled out in a *Times* review by Brooks Atkinson, who praised the dancers in the language of the time. "Every Negro show includes wonderful dancing," he wrote. "Tall and short Negroes... torrid maidens in flashy costumes and bare-chested bucks break out into a number of wild, grotesque, animalistic dances." But the photographer and writer Carl Van Vechten was more specific in his praise, pointing out the pair's "desperate energy" before focussing on Ailey, whom he described as "young, beautiful, strong, with a perfect body and with the technique well welded into his system." He added, "He knows how to approach practically all the dance problems, except perhaps of classical ballet."

Dancers, more than any other performing artists, live in a constant state of humiliation. They are criticized in the most demeaning way: You're too heavy. Your legs are too short or too long. You don't have enough technique. You're too sexy—or not sexy enough. Throughout his life, Ailey, who had a large frame, lamented his weight, his limited ballet training, and so on, but what really upset him, I think, was the feeling that, as a queer Black kid, he lacked a certain inner grace. That grace belonged to those others, over there, and not to him. You can see in "Revelations," which he made only five years or so after appearing in "House of Flowers," a wish: to be as elegant as those Sunday ladies, as strong and self-assured as those proud gentlemen in their vests.

After "House of Flowers" closed, in 1955, Ailey's next significant gig was a long time coming. In 1957, he choreographed a duet for himself and his new dance partner Christine Lawson to use as an audition piece for the musical "Jamaica," starring Lena Horne. "Alvin looked to

me like a young football player," Horne wrote. "He was so huge and beautifully built and full of energy. All of the dancers were as talented as he was, probably, and maybe a few even more so, but no one loved work more or worked harder to learn than he did." Moved by Ailey and the other dancers' commitment to their craft—how they went to class day after day, despite being low on funds and on anything like the kind of acclaim that Horne herself had received—she made sure that they could use the stage to develop their own work when the theatre was dark. "Jamaica" was a hit with audiences, if not with the critics, and by the time the show closed, in 1959, Ailey was on his way, anxious to share what he was learning.

Ailey's apprenticeship as a choreographer wasn't long—he made only ten pieces before premiering "Revelations," in New York. Filled with memories of Ailey's Texas past, "Revelations" also reflects other influences—his interest in Henry Moore's sculptures, for one, all that graphic force and reach. But, in a way, "Revelations" is bigger than itself. It's framed by Ailey's certainty that Black Americans had a story to tell—and part of that story was the Southern Black experience, an experience in which faith was a freeing agent, not a repressive one, an experience that was segregated and stained with blood, and still is, decades after Ailey's death.

On tour with Horton, Ailey had suffered the indignities of racism not only in the South but up North, too—though New York was a haven for artists who believed in integration, and in the city he had friendships that ranged farther than he would have imagined possible elsewhere. Still, as a "sissy," he had lived in the world more or less on his own. That kind of isolation can foster self-hatred in the soul. Throughout his life, Ailey struggled with what would now be called bipolar disorder. He fought to save the cross-addicted men with whom he had relationships. He died of complications from AIDS at the age of fifty-eight. (Lula outlived him by some five years.) He had not found a home for himself, but he had wanted to build one for others like him. This was a tremendous dream in 1960, and the success of "Revelations" helped him call attention to it. In 1969, in the culturally segregated world of dance, he founded the Ailey School, a training

ground where dancers of color could be taught and appreciated.

The sheer amount of energy that Ailey expended in order to make a self—and, by extension, a company—that reflected his curious, closeted, fearful, sometimes thrillingly reckless nature, which is to say, all his "edges," is most stunningly represented in "Edges of Ailey" by an art work that Edwards and the filmmakers Josh Begley and Kya Lou have created. Wrapped around the perimeter of the museum's fifth floor is a video installation incorporating years of footage from the Ailey archives. You see Jamison, gorgeous and moving like no other person on earth, as she makes her way through a solo dance that Ailey choreographed for her, "Cry," from 1971. Then, seamlessly, you view the same piece performed by a more recent Ailey dancer, before continuing on to footage of Ailey's tributes to Duke Ellington, intercut with scenes from Studio 54, the energy and synthetic high of those years. Watching the film, you are sometimes startled to see the leonine head of Ailey himself. You hear him talking about the work he wants to make, or see him teaching a class, and then you witness dancers from the early years of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre pushing toward the front of a stage, their backs arched or straight, hands clenched or open, legs thrown up high or crouching, as they declare their various selves. It's a moving-image world—a visual stream that flows through Ailey's history and reflects his restlessness, his desire to stay in motion, to keep going beyond "Revelations."

Ultimately, Ailey himself wearied of his most famous piece. In his autobiography, he writes:

About fifteen or twenty years ago, when we were setting out on a European tour, I said, "I want to stop taking this piece to Europe." I made up my mind to leave "Revelations" home. But after two performances the dancers and audiences were asking, "Where's 'Revelations'?" and of course we had to relent. It was so popular a piece that it was dangerous to lead off a performance with it. Once we did it first on a program, everybody went home after it was over. Even after all these years, we still feel that our season at New York City Center, where we play for four weeks, hasn't really begun until we do "Revelations." If we open on a Wednesday and "Revelations" isn't presented until Sunday, the stage somehow hasn't yet been blessed.

As for me, though, I'm more interested in what's next. ♦



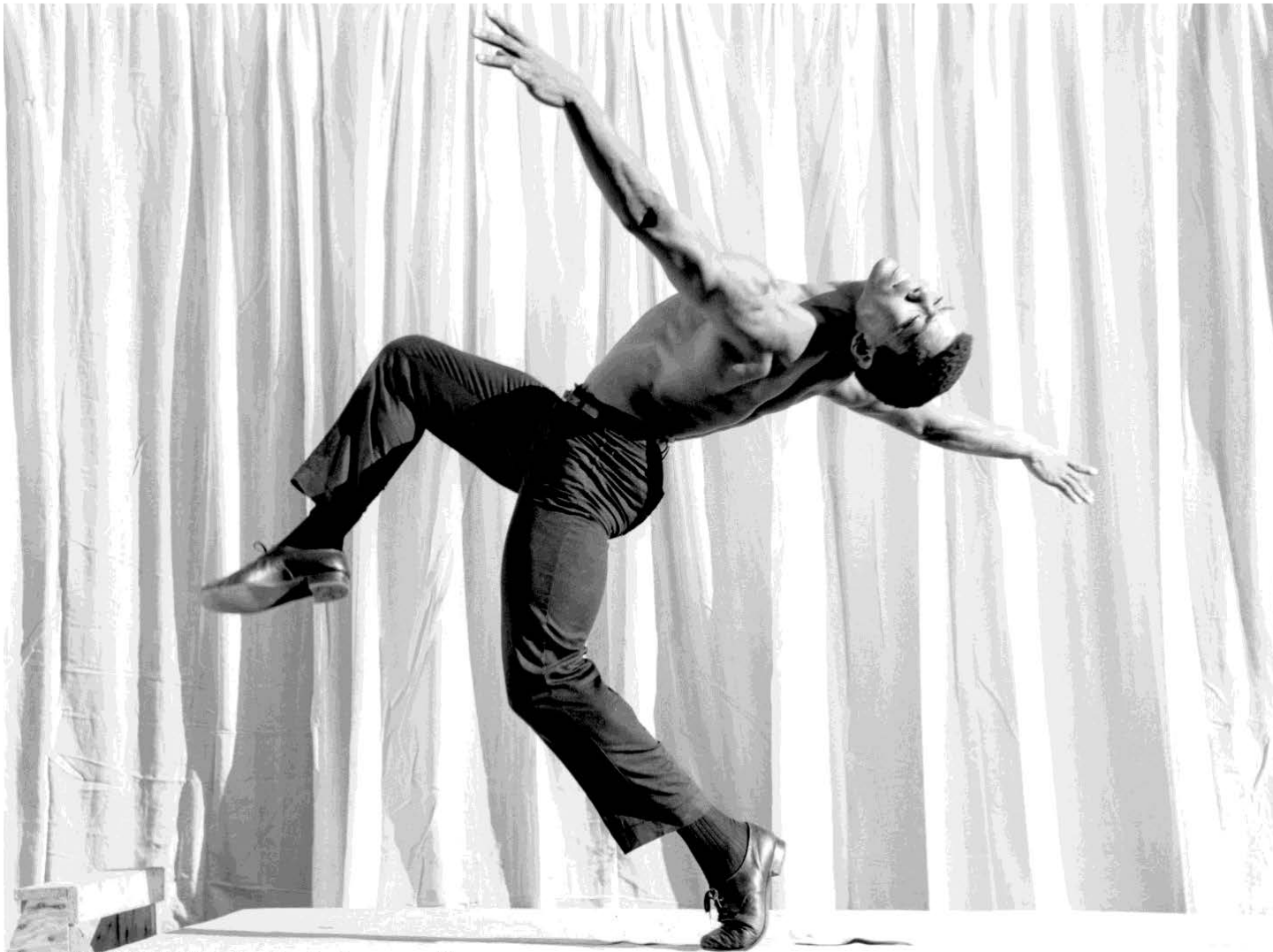
By: Gia Kourlas
September 15, 2024

26 AR

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2024

THE NEW SEASON

Dance



Alvin Ailey's Unapologetic Sparkle

In a new show at the Whitney, the choreographer takes center stage. It's another revelation.

By GIA KOURLAS

The name Ailey is synonymous with dance. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is more than a company: It's a brand, an integral piece of the cultural fabric of this country. It's huge.

But somehow the man who created the Ailey empire has become lost inside it, obscured as if by an eclipse. Alvin Ailey was a choreographer who seamlessly melded dance forms, a dancer of extraordinary strength and beauty, and a man — a queer man — with an expansive, restless mind.

He formed his company in 1958 and died of AIDS in 1989. He was only 58. What Ailey accomplished in his short life was remarkable: Building an internationally known dance company, an esteemed school and a body of work that explored the Black experience and dance history in a multitude of ways, while also mining the culture that surrounded him. He was very much engaged in the worlds of visual art, literature, poetry, music and gay life. Everything was his clay. His company was integrated — on purpose — but he inspired Black dancers particularly, showing them that there was a place for them.

Certainly Ailey is a father of Black dance — especially of Black modern dance. Did he want to be? The Ailey organization is perhaps the only institution that has come close to or surpassed the success of modern dance's longtime artistic rival: ballet. But for Ailey, it came at a price. The weight of it all must have been crushing. "Use tea for drug needs," he advised himself in one of his personal notebooks.

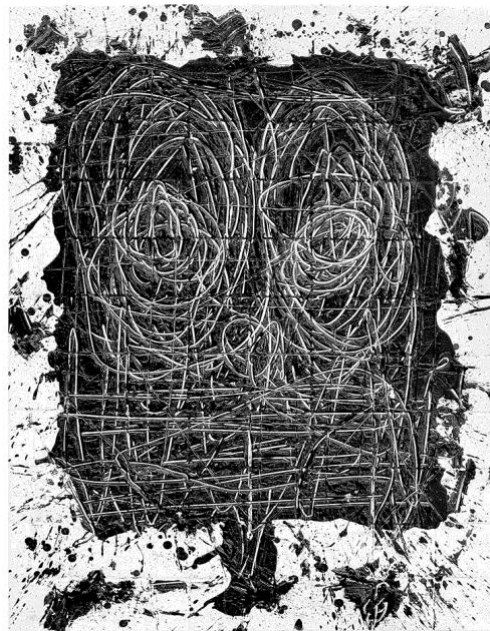
"Edges of Ailey," opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art on Sept. 25, is a one-of-a-kind exhibition that looks at Ailey in all his dimensions, personal and artistic, as well as the culture that he shaped. One of the most ambitious shows the museum has ever presented — six years in the making and bigger than any Whitney biennial — it tracks the development of an American art form through Ailey's singular vision. Here is a chance to better understand the man behind that vision, to watch his dances with new eyes. Organized by Adrienne Edwards, the Engell Speyer Family Senior Curator, "Edges of Ailey" consists of an extensive exhibition in the Whitney's fifth-floor galleries, as well as a series of performances through February by the Ailey company and commissioned choreographers.

Edwards, who grew up studying dance, said Ailey was "probably the first professional art anything" she ever saw. "I've been thinking about Ailey for most of my life."

For years she remained a loyal audience member, regularly attending the annual December seasons of Ailey at New York City Center. The Whitney show, she said, could have been about a company. But as she and her curatorial team started to explore Ailey's archives — especially his notebooks — her thinking shifted. "What I realized is that we were dealing with a life," she said. "It is about the artistry, and there's real work to do there.



LYNETTE YIADOM-BOAKYE, VIA THE ARTIST. CORVI-MORA AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY



RASHID JOHNSON



BARKLEY HENDRICKS

Top, Alvin Ailey, the subject of an ambitious show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Center, "Fly Trap" by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. Above, Barkley Hendricks's "Dancer" (1977). Left, Rashid Johnson's "Untitled Anxious Men" (2016). Besides showing Ailey in all of his dimensions, "Edges of Ailey" also looks at the culture he helped shaped.

But there's also this life that was so present in these notebooks."

Edwards instantly had questions: "Who was this man that started this in 1958?" she recalled thinking. "How did he arrive to that moment to do what he did?"

In Ailey's notebooks — entrusted to Allan Gray, a longtime friend at the Black Archives of Mid-America in Kansas City, Mo. — you see a vivid mind at work. They are filled with musings about choreographers and composers, sketches for new dances, thoughts about drugs and sex. One note, "The School Rules," leads with: "Students of the school must not smoke, cigarettes, marijuana, pot, hashish, angel dust, Marlboro, Kent etc."

The rules are harder for him to follow. On another page, he writes, "Do not take any coke." (The word "more" is crossed out.) Ditto smoking. "Plan your funeral — do will — if you continue smoking c'est pas possible!!"

Ailey, it turns out, was a writer as well as a fervent list maker. There are short stories and poetry. There are packing lists — pot, poppers — as well as an assessment of his character. One positive: "basically honest." On the negative side: "lack of self-control."

Somehow you feel Ailey through his handwriting, which ranges from shaky to bold and from cursive to all caps. His ambition and self-doubt, his humor and sadness — it's all there. One note, under the heading "1980," reads: "Nervous breakdown. 7 weeks was in hosp—" There is also unflinching generosity. Ailey created his company to show not only his own dances, but also those of others, including many Black choreographers. In one entry, "Hopes for the Future," the goal to "create choreographers" comes ahead of "create choreography."

You see Ailey's preoccupations. "Water recurs as a theme," Edwards said, and "he talks about cruising." There are other references, including erotic writing, to his life as a gay man, which he was not so open about at the time. Cruising is alluded to in notes about his 1974/1975 work "Night Creature," in which he refers to Duke Ellington, whose music the dance is set to, and tellingly to "the people who are themselves at night."

Under the heading "sex," are two phone numbers. ("I called those phone numbers," Edwards said. "No one answered.")

But while the notebooks track the events of his personal life, they also contain sketches for dances and names of artists and poets. "He had a genuine curiosity," Edwards said. "The things he was reading. The regular citations of Hart Crane. Like, who would have thought? What is it about this poet that he so identified with?"

She found mentions of many artists in the notebooks, and she was especially struck by an interview in which Ailey said: "I wanted to be a painter. I wanted to be a sculptor. I wanted to write the great American novel. I wanted to be a poet. And for me, dance somehow holds all of these things."

That gave Edwards the idea to open the show up visually. Along with performance footage, recorded interviews and pieces from his personal archive, "Edges of Ailey" has sections about his influences, including

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29

THE NEW SEASON

Dance

Showing Off Alvin Ailey’s Unapologetic Sparkle

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26
the choreographers Katherine Dunham, Martha Graham, Jack Cole and many more. And it features works by more than 80 artists, including Barkley L. Hendricks and Rashid Johnson, to help to place Ailey in greater context while also chronicling Black creativity in the United States.

In this way, Ailey is positioned not just in the history of dance, but in the history of American culture. Edwards is telling stories from one artist, or generation, to the next: One of Johnson’s first paintings from his “Anxious Men” series is placed next to Ailey’s nervous breakdown notebook entry.

“The way we think about dance in relationship to modernism, in art history, they are usually sort of separate,” Edwards said. “We’re not doing that here.”

Beyond the artwork and performance footage, the museum will host a robust series of live dancing, beginning with the Ailey company and Ailey II. There will also be new commissioned works, from the veteran choreographers Bill T. Jones and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, as well as from experimental voices including Trajal Harrell, Ralph Lemon (with the artist Kevin Beasley), Sarah Michelson and Will Rawls.

Matthew Rushing, the Ailey company’s interim artistic director, will present “Sacred Songs,” a new dance set to music that had to be cut from Ailey’s 1960 masterpiece, “Revelations,” when it was shortened for touring. Rushing’s cast is made up of nonprofessional dancers — students from the Ailey Extension — and he has not needed to water down anything for them. “They have shown up in a way that I did not expect,” he said. “It’s inspiring me to push myself further.”

Rawls spent an important summer studying at the Ailey school, though he now makes work that is largely conceptual, driven by language. “I would not be in the career that I am without Alvin Ailey having existed,” he said. “I don’t really see how I could have been inspired and encouraged to be a dancer, and then a choreographer, if I didn’t have the example of that company.”

The same is true for Harrell, who never went the Ailey route but feels “the grandeur and the burden of his accomplishment.”

And the sacrifice. “I think he and Arthur Mitchell” — who formed Dance Theater of Harlem — “are part of that generation that had to prove something as Black dancers, that there was a space for them, that they *could* do dance as an art form,” he added. “They had to make that space. But because

that space was made, I didn’t have to do it.”

At the Whitney, Harrell presents a work inspired by Katherine Dunham, an important role model for Ailey. The dance, “Deathbed,” is based on Harrell’s memory of visiting a dying Dunham. A friend took him. Years later, while working on a series inspired by the Butoh pioneer Tatsumi Hijikata, he learned that Dunham and Hijikata had once shared a studio in Japan.

He started to wonder, How much influence did Dunham have on Hijikata and, in turn, on Butoh? Harrell’s “Deathbed” is about the idea of a suspended moment, the what-ifs, the questions that were never asked, just as “Edges of Ailey” deals at times with topics little discussed.

“If I had been a little boy and I had known when I went to see that first Alvin Ailey concert that he was queer,” Harrell said, “I don’t know how that would change my life.”

For Harrell, who comes from a tradition of post-postmodern dance, Ailey fits into modernism, but not the modernism of abstraction. The image of the Black dancer represents, he said, “an expression of feeling.”

Ailey’s work, he added, was “linked to this idea of Black liberation, of struggle, of trying to find a visual and physical representation.”

What made Ailey different was that expressiveness: “That Ailey sparkle,” Edwards said, which relates “to an insistence on entertaining or a certain kind of pleasure or a certain kind of beauty. He was totally unapologetic about it.”

Edwards is not afraid of sparkle, either. She’s a different kind of curator, and dance was her first art love. “I see almost everything as a performance,” she said, “like the most mundane things. I’m always asking myself the question: Is something performing here? *What* is performing here?”

“Edges of Ailey” has a sense of theater, of choreography; she sees Ailey as a person that surrounded himself with a constellation of influences and wants to show that in a visceral way. “I’m not interested in walking up to a wall or looking at a work of art,” Edwards said. “I’m interested in how do all these things flow together or work together or where’s the edge? And how my body in that space is going to relate to the things around it. That kind of shapes or contours everything that I do as a curator.”

How might an exhibition, in other words, make you feel or make you see life differently? It circles back to a line from the notebooks. Ailey writes: “We teach people to feel — to own their own feelings.”



LORNA SIMPSON, VIA HAUSER & WIRTH



FRED FEHL, THE HARRY RANSOM CENTER

Top, Lorna Simpson’s “Momentum” (2011), which is a two-channel video installation that is part of the Alvin Ailey exhibition at the Whitney Museum. Above, from Ailey’s “Masekela Langage,” as performed by his company in 1972.

FRIEZE

Carry Forward

By: Malik Gaines, Alastair Macaulay, Constance Stamatiou and Eva Yaa Asantewaa

October 2024

Festschrift: As Alvin Ailey's retrospective opens at the Whitney Museum, *Malik Gaines, Alastair Macaulay, Constance Stamatiou* and members of the choreographer's company reflect on how his astonishing vision changed American dance

Carry Forward



The virtuosity of Alvin Ailey proposed
an alternative to the forward march of 20th-century
art history by Malik Gaines

The Line Becomes a Spiral

Alvin Ailey has been a huge inspiration to me, though the influence may not be immediately obvious on the surface of my practice. As an artist working in performance for the past 24 years, I've enjoyed the opportunity to mix things up, playing with the supposed distinctions among presence, history, 'the body', theatre, media, spectacle, the everyday and technical artforms. While I lack virtuoso technique in my own performance, the closest I've come to that is in practicing an advanced form of interdisciplinarity and, increasingly, working with trained musicians. The space between an accessible, vernacular event and a masterful performance is historically fraught and politically charged, especially in relation to Black artists and the expectations they face. It is in this context that José Esteban Muñoz, in his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009), described the work of my performance collective, My Barbarian, as an example of 'queer virtuosity', which he posed as an ironic inversion of the then-prominent theoretical idea of 'queer failure'. Our work, he argued, departed from the demands of performing art but, inspired by the performers who influenced us, we were trying to succeed.

There is much to learn about virtuosity from Ailey's legacy. It's also instructive to see the ways his powerful, expressive work distorts an avant-gardist, modernist genealogy. The 20th century flowed in many directions at once, while the fine art traditions some of us were taught proposed Oedipal relations of fathers and sons carrying a family line of art in one direction: always forward. As the avant-garde's patrimony was constantly to upend conventional expectations through ever-inventive formal innovations, this model of artistic invention conformed to a Eurocentric historical idea of modernity that cloaked its churning violent ruptures as progress. Not surprisingly, as the inheritors of this violence, Black people have often followed other paths through art.

Ailey understood modern dance. Mentored by dancer-choreographer Lester Horton in Los Angeles, he was

a student of all the techniques by the time he got to New York, in the late 1950s. Ailey benefitted from an excess of influences: ballet, the Afro-Caribbean impulses of Katherine Dunham, Broadway and his own family experiences all contributed to his syncretic approach. This was evident in the works of his company. During the mid-century heyday of New York abstraction, Ailey developed a vocabulary to represent beauty, pain, pleasure, abjection, striving and excellence from a historically Black American perspective. These works are sedimented with the unfathomable skill and technique of his company and energized by the exuberant reproduction of Black life they offered.

When, in 1971, Judith Jamison premiered Ailey's *Cry* – a *tour de force* of nearly superhuman power that narrated a movement through oppression and freedom – the critics cheered with everyone else. But they also noted that this virtuoso star-power was out of step. In the aftermath of works like Yvonne Rainer's 'No Manifesto' (1964), which said no to moving and being moved, New York dance was decidedly minimal. Ailey's maximalism – one that remains popular with audiences to this day – was a necessity, since Black companies, choreographers, authors and artists had not been a substantial part of the avant-garde's family drama. Black people had danced, for sure, but they had made few concert dances. As such, they bore no requirement to carry forward the lineage's investments. *Cry* made large historical claims and formally interfered with dance's progress but, designed by Ailey as a birthday gift to his mother, hewed closely to a personal experience not recognizable from downtown dance stages. The supposed straight line of history becomes a spiral when we look at it from another perspective.

Malik Gaines is an artist and member of the collective My Barbarian.

Previous page
Alvin Ailey surrounded
by the *Compass*, 1978.
Courtesy: © Alvin Ailey
Dance Foundation, Inc.
and the Smithsonian
Institution; photo-
graph: Jack Mitchell

Opposite page
Alvin Ailey and Carmen
De Lavallade in *Rest
of the Blues*, 1981.
Courtesy: © Alvin Ailey
Dance Foundation, Inc.
and the Smithsonian
Institution; photo-
graph: Jack Mitchell



Current and former members of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater reflect on the legacy of the great choreographer by *Eva Yaa Asantewaa*

Dancer from the Dance



Alvin Ailey gave the world of dance many decades of extraordinary memories, and those of us fortunate enough to have experienced his company's performances surely have a favourite. Your first *Revelations* (1960). Maybe your 30th. The first time you watched Judith Jamison dance *Cry*. Or the time you cried as Jamison took her last spin in this classic. Filing into theatre seats with mum and dad, grandma, aunts, the kids – all soon united in wonder at a big stage filled with performers of exquisite technique, charisma and soul. Ailey's legacy, though, is more than nostalgia. Here, some members of the Ailey community share what made him an innovative visionary, not only for his company but for the field of dance and society at large.

Sylvia Waters
Former company member;
artistic director emerita, Ailey II

Ailey had a lot in mind for the future: building a repertory company and finding a home for it, having dancers with all techniques reconciled in one body – the total dancer. His early commissions came from ballet troupes such as American Ballet Theatre, Joffrey Ballet and the Royal Danish Ballet; he loved classical line. He wanted you to point your feet as well as to flex them. He left a master plan for a school teaching multiple disciplines – Martha Graham, Lester Horton, samba, tap, West African. Movement is our first language, and he used that exceedingly well. No language barrier. He said dance comes from the people and should be given back to the people.

He left a master plan for a school teaching multiple disciplines.

Sylvia Waters



Jacquelin Harris
Company member since 2014;
choreographer

Ailey created the company to honour his voice and the voices of the marginalized and oppressed. When you see that we all have similar ideals, intentions and hopes, you must acknowledge everyone's purpose in the world. We all deserve human rights, the pursuit of happiness and the opportunity to be hopeful and to triumph. Honesty and humanity are things I've learned in this company. Authenticity, too. As a creator myself, that is immensely valuable. I grew up in a world in which dance was showy. I tried to show the audience how graceful I am. But in this company, I learned that if you bring your authentic self to the audience, they will see that grace and receive exactly what they need to receive.



We think dance is the
putting on of things – really,
it's the revealing.

Jamar Roberts

Jamar Roberts
Former company member;
resident choreographer, 2019–22

Ailey knew exactly what he wanted to communicate and did so clearly. I've always been drawn to that level of vision – creating whole narratives by delving into the passions and hearts of people. Sometimes we think dance is the putting on of things – the more I turn, the higher I jump – when, really, it's the revealing. I look at dancers in their 40s or 50s, and it's always about the simplest things. All the beauty's there. I remember watching Renee Robinson dance certain roles towards the end of her career and being completely floored. One movement of her head was enough to bring me to tears. Sometimes I feel like an outlier because I'm always trying to hold onto that.

This spread
"Edges of Ailey", 2024–25,
Whitney Museum of
American Art, New York.
Courtesy: Whitney
Museum of American
Art; photographs:
Natasha Moustache

Danni Gee
Former company member;
director of programming, The Joyce Theater

Dancers from Ailey II have gone on to various careers – whether into the main company, as choreographers in their own right or as directors. Ailey wasn't selfish. He inspired younger dancers to put their own vision on stage. He encouraged Dwight Rhoden very early on, which led to Dwight's Complexions Contemporary Ballet. Alvin would wander the streets talking to people, so he could bring to the stage an understanding of the universal themes we all have to deal with every day – like facing death, questioning our faith. We, as a people have always celebrated, no matter what our conditions. In my role as curator and presenter, I have to make sure we express those themes and messages. A lot of the dance artists I admire and champion are storytellers – like Kyle Abraham – touched by Alvin's genius, his curiosity and his love of Black people. He was always searching for his next new thought to keep evolving. He was unlimited!



Alvin Ailey's most important dance
dwelled in history to celebrate freedom
by Alastair Macaulay

Revelator

THE OPENING OF ALVIN AILEY's *Revelations* (1960) is always cast to show a whole spectrum of skin tones. In its first movement, 'I Been 'Buked', the tension of outstretched arms and splayed hands demonstrates, with intensity, what analysts refer to as 'bound' movement. The whole number lyrically suggests imprisonment, even when it gathers speed in the central section. As the dancers move their torsos sideways and around - above all, when they raise their arms and sway - it's as if they are describing a small vision of blue sky high above their prison. As *Revelations* continues, we watch gestures of outstretched arms, hands and legs, but with new phrasings and rhythms that suggest that these dancers, with no loss of grandiloquence, are casting off any chains that once bound them. Its largeness of spirit has always made *Revelations* a classic; its stylistic variety has established it as a masterpiece of expression. In 1842, Verdi, in his opera *Nabucco*, composed a famous 'Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves' that became the anthem of the Italian Risorgimento, the movement that led to the rejection of foreign occupation and the unification of Italy. Ailey's *Revelations* is a political dance in a related but different way: it embodies the longings and ardour of a people moving out of slavery into joyous pride in community.

Tapping the unforgotten grief of slavery, the profound fervour of liberation and the intense release of communal celebration, the choreography of Ailey's *Revelations* relies on fixed gestures and tableaux, while the varied skin hues form a visual statement about how the US (and the world) contains multitudes. Even though the imagery here is of suffering and of pleas for freedom, it also reminds us that we are not alone in that suffering, that those feelings onstage are ours, too. We're all involved here. Its spirit, for Black and other audiences alike, can be overwhelming. It reminds me most of Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1805), the composer's opera about unfair imprisonment. And *Revelations*, in its use of words and music and movement, is as much opera as dance, especially when the singing is live. It has no single narrative, yet at every point it offers great lyric drama.

From its first moments to its last, *Revelations* draws us into the devout expansiveness of the music - into layers of feeling that are both specifically African American

and universal - through an expressive counterpoint of gospel and blues. As *Revelations* progresses from there, it seems to take us through successive rooms of different heights and scales, in a systematic process. We watch human beings change - in a process of catharsis that, in turn, changes us. The most intimate stages occur in 'Fix Me, Jesus' and 'I Wanna Be Ready'. 'Fix Me, Jesus', a male-female duet, is a tenderly heroic dialogue between pastor and convert, healer and healed; the woman's beautiful alternations between dependence on the man and independence from him are movingly glorious. In the male solo 'I Wanna Be Ready', the dialogue comes from within the lone human: we're shown impulse and counter-impulse as part of continuous discipline. Both 'Fix Me, Jesus' and 'I Wanna Be Ready' are dances of heightened rigour: rigour both physical and spiritual.

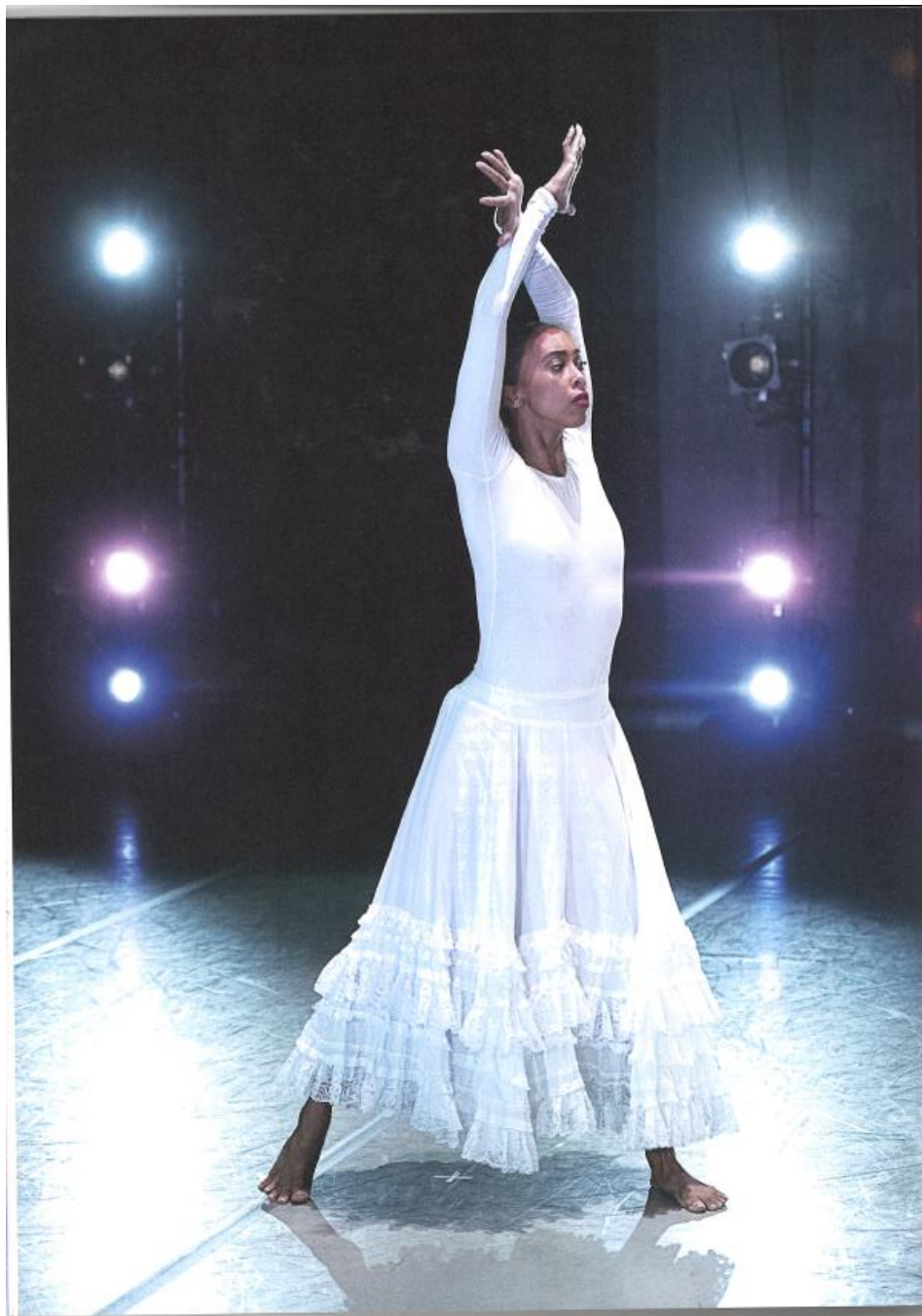
Each section is composed in a different dance idiom. We watch for their interconnected meanings. Seen literally, the movement in the finale, 'Rocka my Soul in the Bosom of Abraham', depicts (not without comedy) what it's like for a church congregation on a hot day in the American South. By this stage in *Revelations*, however, we can no longer be literal. We've now passed through tribulation and release, sin and redemption, prayer and transfiguration, in a process that has established the uncrushable power of the human spirit, so that we, too, now share its pulsating, multidirectional joy.

Ailey was still in his 20s when he choreographed *Revelations*. He was to make other classics, *Cry* (1971) and *Night Creature* (1974) among them. When he died in 1989 at the age of 58, his choreography, his company and his dance centre had long been important across the world. In the 35 years since his death, that importance has only grown. It's *Revelations*, however, that stays at the core of the Ailey experience, with the many kinds of transcendence it presents. It takes dancers and audiences on a large and complex journey of the spirit.

Alastair Macaulay is a critic and historian of the performing arts. He was chief theatre critic of the *Financial Times*, London, from 1994-2007, and chief dance critic of *The New York Times* from 2007-18.



Alvin Ailey, Lu Ransom and Li Abbott in *Revelations* 1964. Courtesy: AILEY; photos: Zoë Dominic



More than a half century after it premiered,
Cry remains a poignant expression of loss and grief
by Constance Stamatiou

Mourning into Dancing

GROWING UP IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA, in the 1980s, I was often the only minority woman in my dance or gymnastics classes. The significance of representation never dawned on me until I moved to New York after high school, and I saw the Alvin Ailey company for the first time. It just blew my mind that most of the dancers looked like me. That's when I knew what I wanted to do: I wanted to be like them.

Along with so many other dancers and dance lovers, I've always felt a special connection with Ailey's choreography. His dances are experiences that he's lived and turned into movement: these are his blood memories. And so, growing up in the South, growing up in a Baptist church, I could connect with *Revelations* (1960), which is a ballet that swings from the lowest lows and the profoundest sorrows to the most jubilant highs. I've watched closely all the women who performed *Cry* (1971), the dance Ailey choreographed for Judith Jamison. Created as a birthday gift for his mother, this solo was dedicated to 'all Black women everywhere, especially our mothers.'

I first learned *Cry* in 2008, when it was performed as a three-person ballet. Now, since recently returning from maternity leave, I'm performing it as a solo again. Initially, I was anxious because you want to do the piece justice, and so many great women have already danced it. But now, as a mother I can tap into what motherhood brings — the lows, the anxiety, all those things — and I can relate to those mothers that have really been through it, who have lost their kids, which is one of the themes of the ballet. At the beginning of the dance, when I hold a piece of cloth, it represents the dead body of a child. With all

the things going on in the world, all the images we're seeing on the news, *Cry* feels perfect for this moment, for all those mothers who can't hug their children.

Three years ago, we celebrated the ballet's 50th anniversary. When I first danced the role, I can remember feeling unworthy of it. And, over the years, there have been many times when I've thought I wasn't there with it yet, but I've kept pushing, giving it my all. Then, this year, I was nominated for a UK National Dance Award for my performance of *Cry*. My mind was blown! I know I still have further to go with that ballet. I haven't tapped into its fullest potential yet, because I am still learning to be comfortable in my vulnerability. There's something missing: I still need to fully let myself go. When I was in my 20s, I was used to being told what to do, what to think, how to portray; in a sense, I felt I was a fraud. I pretended to be someone that I wasn't. So, when I became a mother of two kids who I would like to see turn into decent human beings, it helped me tap into the dance and what it means to be a mother.

Cry is not a period piece; it resonates with each generation. But now, as a mother in my thirties dancing this ballet, I'm a lot more mature, and I can fill it with my own story. I'm drawing on my own reality rather than an impersonation of someone else's — someone like my mother, who raised four kids, two of whom were incarcerated. When I first performed *Cry*, I tried to tap into those experiences. Now, I have my own voice. ■

Constance Stamatiou
 in *Cry*, 2021. Courtesy:
 AILEY; photograph:
 Christopher Duggan

Constance Stamatiou is a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. She is a lead dancer and was the face of the company's 2023–24 season.

The Boston Globe

Alvin Ailey Company's 65th Is Cause For Celebration

By: Jefferey Gantz

May 4, 2024

THE BOSTON GLOBE

SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2024

LivingArts



ROBERT TORRES

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's 65th anniversary tour arrived at the Boch Center Wang Theatre Thursday. All of this weekend's performances will close with the company's signature work, Ailey's 1960 "Revelations" (pictured).

Alvin Ailey company's 65th is cause for celebration

By Jefferey Gantz
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Not many dance companies can celebrate a 65th anniversary. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater passed that mark last year, and this weekend a 65th anniversary tour brings it back to the Boch Center Wang Theatre, under the auspices of the Celebrity Series. Ailey has been a near-annual Boston fixture over the past half-century, and it's hard to imagine another contemporary dance ensemble popular enough to fill the capacious Wang over a long weekend.

All five performances will close with the company's signature work, Ailey's 1960 "Revelations." The Saturday matinee program will feature "Ailey Classics." The Friday and Saturday evening performances will begin with new productions of Alonzo King's "Following the Subtle Current Upstream" (2000) and Ronald K. Brown's "Dancing Spirit" (2009), the latter a tribute to artistic director emerita Judith Jamison. Thursday's opening bill (to be repeated Sunday afternoon) brought a new-to-Boston pair set on the company: Amy Hall Garner's "Century" (2023), a 100th-birthday gift to her grandfather, and former Ailey dancer Jamar Roberts' "Ode" (2019), described as "a meditation on the beauty and fragility of life in a time of gun violence." One upbeat, one sobering, they made for a fine start to the weekend.

Garner's sunny "Somewhere in the Middle" was on the program that Paul Taylor Dance Company presented at the Shubert in April 2023. "Century" is another nonstop party, and the score is similar, drawn from grandfather Henry Spoorer's favorites. The upbeat "Basie Land" kicks the piece off in front of a shimmering gold curtain backdrop, the five men in red shirts and tan vests, the five women in poufy rose miniskirts, everyone jiving and jitterbugging incessantly, strutting, promenading, all the while reminding us how balletic Ailey

DANCE REVIEW

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

Presented by Celebrity Series of Boston. At Boch Center Wang Theatre, Thursday. Repeats Saturday, Sunday. Tickets \$29-\$99. 800-982-2787. www.celebrityseries.org

dancers can be. Body parts explode in every direction; partnering is fluid until the fourth of the piece's seven sections, where to the Dirty Dozen Brass Band's "Snowball," Hannah Alissa Richardson and James Gilmer have a short but sultry duet.

The fifth section of "Century" is preceded by a brief voice-over from the honoree. Jeroboam Bozeman follows that with a luscious solo to Cyrus Chestnut's "Total Praise," a moment of reflection before Jimmy Hamilton's squealing clarinet from Duke Ellington's "Virgin Land" introduces a swivel-hipping Jacquelin Harris. A leg wagging in the air induces Chalvar Monteiro to join her for a balletic duet; then Steve Allen's "This Could Be the Start of Something Big" launches the cork-popping finale. Like "Somewhere in the Middle," "Century" is a fun piece, but it's Bozeman's solo that sticks.

Roberts created "Ode" in 2019 during his three-year stint as the company's resident choreographer. The New York premiere was danced by six men, but Thursday we got Roberts' alternate version for six women, and that will be the case on Sunday as well. The score is Don Pullen's 1975 solo piano improvisation "Suite (Sweet) Malcolm (Part 1 Memories and Gunshots)," a tribute to Malcolm X.

Against a floral backdrop suggestive of Kehinde Wiley, Corrin Rachelle Mitchell lies on the floor before rising with angular gesticulations. The others join her, all in pale calf-length dresses. As Pullen's tolling gives way to nostalgia, the sextet whirl and gyrate, move in unison and

mirror image, hold hands for a moment. Some five minutes in, the music turns violent, Pullen splattering machine-gun fire all over the keyboard, everyone freezing as if in a police searchlight. Souls as well as bodies are racked by the bullets; in the midst of Pullen's banging and pounding, Harris emerges as a solo figure looking for liberation while her five sisters form a kind of Greek chorus. Eventually all six huddle, shrouded in darkness while the floral backdrop is spotlight. There's a hint of affirmation as the music unwinds, and a group embrace. Then the other five lay Mitchell back down and walk out.

Both "Century" and "Ode" were well received Thursday, but the roar that greeted the opening tableau of the evening's final work reminded one that, as always, it's "Revelations" that everybody comes to see. There's no mystery here. Ailey's 64-year-old choreography looks as fresh as ever, responsive as it is to every nuance of the gospel numbers that make up the score. The gull shapes that first appear in "I've Been 'Buked" suggest angels; when in "Fix Me, Jesus" Caroline T. Darter executes an eye-popping 360-degree turn in seconde and then perches in arabesque on Jermaine Terry's knee, she's clearly won her wings. Solomon Damas, Miranda Quinn, and Ashley Mayeux have as clearly walked through the fire in "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel." The celebration of "Wade in the Water," where the Holy Spirit sends bodies into ecstasy, yields just momentarily to Vernard J. Gilmore's anguished attempt to rise under the weight of sin in "I Wanna Be Ready" and then the trio of Gilmer, Monteiro, and Shawn Cusaux redeeming themselves with big jets and zippy pirouettes in "Sinner Man." Deliverance through dancing is the goal, and no one has ever doubted that "Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham" delivers. Amen to that.

Jeffrey Gantz can be reached at jeffreymgantz@gmail.com.

By: Kyle MacMillan

April 21, 2024

46 | Sunday, April 21, 2024 | The Hardest-Working Paper in America | suntimes.com ♦

★ ENTERTAINMENT

CS★T

BY KYLE MACMILLAN
For the Sun-Times

Revelations," Alvin Ailey's exultant 1960 tribute to the African-American spirit, ranks among the most celebrated masterpieces of modern dance alongside José Limón's "The Moor's Pavane" (1949) or Paul Taylor's "Esplanade" (1975), and rightly so.

But there can be too much of a good thing, and it was refreshing Friday evening to see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater step away from the classic (for at least one program) to present a wonderfully fresh line-up with two works that debuted in 2023 and two slightly older pieces that received new productions that same year. The cheers from the audience made clear that the presentation was a crowd-pleaser.

The program is one of three that the New York-based ensemble is presenting as part of a six-performance run at the Auditorium Theatre that will conclude Sunday afternoon with "Ailey Classics," a program devoted entirely to works created by its founder and namesake.

In what has become an extraordinary and historic partnership, this visit is the company's 55th engagement at the venerable Chicago venue. And as usual, it cut no corners, bringing a full complement of 34 dancers and the three commendably contrasting and ambitious line-ups.

The only big change this time around comes in the company's leadership. Robert Battle, who served as its artistic director since 2011, resigned in November because of health concerns. Matthew Rushing, a company alumnus who became associate artistic director in 2020, is filling in on an interim basis.

Despite that shift at the top, the dancers were their usual model of consistency onstage, performing with all the brio, athleticism and virtuosic technique that has long been the norm with this enduring company.

The only small knock on Friday's program was the puzzling order of the works. Typically, on a mixed-repertoire lineup of this kind, companies open and close with big ensemble numbers, and, in "sandwich" fashion, present smaller pieces in the middle as kind of palate cleansers. In this case, the Ailey company began with the evening's two short pieces, a duet and another for three dancers, bringing the first intermission in oddly quick fashion, and they both got a little lost in the memory by the night's end.

It also didn't help that the opener, "Me, Myself and You" (2023), is an intimate, contemplative work performed to a recorded rendition of Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood" by vocalist Brandie Sutton. A hard sell when attendees are settling in their seats and not yet fully tuned in.

That said, it is a sensual twosome by choreographer Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrich,



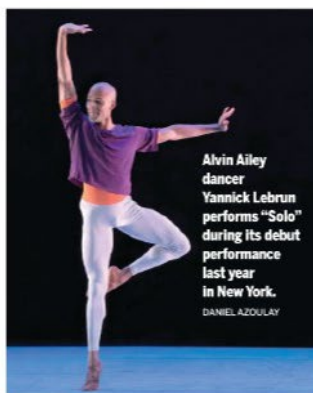
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater debuts Amy Hall Garner's "Century" in New York in 2023. The new work was presented for the first time in Chicago on Thursday night as part of the company's six-show residency at the Auditorium Theatre. ©PAUL KOLNIK

FRESH FLAIR

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater steps away from classics with two new impressive works

who joined the Ailey company in 1984, became its first Filipina principal dancer and now teaches at the Ailey School. And it was beautifully and flowingly performed by Caroline T. Dartey and James Gilmer, with some lovely, intimate moments like his cradling her in his arms in a kind of loosely folded position and gently swinging her side to side.

Next up was "Solo" (1997), a lively, technically demanding classic by now 91-year-old Dutch choreographer Hans van Manen that has a slightly misleading title. The tightly crafted work, which perfectly fits the music by Johann Sebastian Bach, is actually for three dancers but they trade off doing thrusting, arms-driven solos and only come together as a trio momentarily at the end. The three dancers — Shawn Cusseaux, Yannick Lebrun and Chalvar Monteiro — were nothing short of superb, bringing ample doses of alacrity, dexterity, agility and zest to everything they did.



Alvin Ailey dancer Yannick Lebrun performs "Solo" during its debut performance last year in New York. DANIEL AZOULAY

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER ★★★½

When: 3 p.m. today, "Ailey Classics"

Where: Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Ida B. Wells

Tickets: \$59-\$174

Info: auditoriumtheatre.org

The weakest link in the evening's line-up was arguably Alonzo King's "Following the Subtle Current Upstream" (2000), a sometimes stark work for 10 dancers. It contains an array of contrasting looks and moods, elaborate cross-lighting effects and a sharply variegated soundtrack that never completely jell into a unified whole.

The evening was capped with the program's second new work — New York choreographer's Amy Hall Garner's "Century" (2023) — a rousing, showy, high-stepping work for 10 dancers. It looks back to vaudeville and the Golden Age of Broadway musicals with the men in vests and slacks and the women in ruffled dresses.

Garner possesses a keen feel for jazz and show dancing, and she offers her own slightly updated take without diverging too far from the traditions, with an abundance of stylish shimmying and strutting and a little flirting to spice things up.

"Century" was an absolutely ideal closer for an absolutely winning evening.

Chicago Tribune

Mixtape Of Artistry and Legacy Gets Us 'In Our Feelings'

By: Lauren Warnecke

April 19, 2024

REVIEW ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER ★★★½

Mixtape of artistry and legacy gets us 'in our feelings'

By Lauren Warnecke
For the Chicago Tribune

If a hot girl summer was a dance, it might look something like choreographer Kyle Abraham's "Are You in Your Feelings?" It's vibrant and beautiful, fleeting and flirtatious, curious, casual and messy — in a good way.

Abraham's third work for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater held the middle spot in a program of three works Wednesday, kicking off the dance company's annual spring series in Chicago. The mixed bill is one of three alternating through Sunday at the Auditorium Theatre.

A second viewing of "Are You in Your Feelings" after last year's Chicago premiere helped, as did time for the dancers to wrap their heads around the piece's jumble of styles and steps. It's not a literal or narrative journey — it's a vibe, complemented by a mixtape of R&B, soul and hip hop tracks and a stunning setting: iridescent separates by costume designer Karen Young and an exquisite backdrop by lighting designer Dan Scully, who frames the ensemble with a semi-circular LED tube swooping through the vertical space, transposed periodically as a colorful scoop on the cyclorama.

Abraham seasons the work's nonchalant, pedestrian flavors with dashes of balletic and street dance vocabulary. Vignettes loosely translate to looking for love (occasionally in the wrong places). He seems to nostalgically nod to a time when partners met each other in person, IRL, by happenstance — not by algorithm. And that's what makes it a beau-



The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performs in Kyle Abraham's "Are You in Your Feelings?" PAUL KOLNIK

tiful mess.

One section, set to Shirley Brown's "Woman to Woman," finds Caroline Dartey and Corrin Rachele Mitchell squabbling over the same man. A gorgeous *pas de deux* for Michael Jackson, Jr. and James Gilmer burns slowly to Maxwell's "Symptom Unknown." But if Abraham made this piece with any one dancer in mind, it has to be powerhouse Ashley Kaylynn Green, who carries the piece all the way through to its exuberant end at the front of an ensemble that simmers, but never boils. Green is a reassuring reminder that you've got to love yourself before you can love anybody else, swerving in

and out of a beautiful pairing with Chalvar Monteiro that begins and ends the piece but does not define her intoxicating essence.

The evening opened with choreographer Ronald K. Brown's effervescent "Dancing Spirit," a near-perfect example of composition distilling its ending, an Afro-Caribbean joy bomb to its very essence. In some ways, "Dancing Spirit" is an exercise in patience, beginning with dancer Solomon Dumas patterning through a series of simple, striking extensions of the arm, revolving in a singular spotlight up stage. Others join, repeating the phrase with subtle variations mimicked in designer Omatayo Wunmi Olai-

ya's individualized blue and white ombre dresses and separates. You see it enough times to recognize glimmers of this beginning woven throughout the piece and infused in its ebullient finale. Music by Wynton Marsalis, Radiohead and War supports that emotional arc, but the beginning is accompanied by solo vibraphone, a recording of Stefon Harris' arrangement of Duke Ellington's "Single Petal of a Rose." Originally part of his 1959 Queen's Suite, Ellington made just one copy of the work at first, and presented it to Queen Elizabeth II. Brown created "Dancing Spirit" as an homage to Ailey's matriarch, artistic director emerita Judith Jamison, who was in

the director's chair when the piece premiered in 2009. She'll turn 81 in May.

"Generous, elegant, royal servant. Yemeya," says Brown in a recording describing the piece. He references the Yoruba goddess of creation, water, motherhood and protection. "Moving together on a shared accord — path clearly designed by the most high and all her or his servants."

Indeed, Jamison's life force continues to be felt in the Ailey company and pulses through soloist Hannah Alissa Richardson's torso and out through her fingertips in "Dancing Spirit's" most literal reference to her legacy — Richardson's partner Dumas, who embodies a part originated by the current captain of the Ailey ship, Matthew Rushing, who stepped in last winter when artistic director Robert Battle stepped away after 12 years at the helm.

Ailey's 1960 classic "Revelations" acts as the customary finale to this and a third line-up of Ailey classics, but they've dared to remove it from Program B, an exciting smattering of new and refurbished works by Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrich, Hans van Manen, Alonzo King and Amy Hall Garner running Friday and Saturday afternoon.

Lauren Warnecke is a freelance critic.

When: Through Sunday
Where: Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Ida B. Wells Drive
Running time: 2 hours, 25 minutes with two intermissions
Tickets: \$40-\$174 at 312-341-2300 and auditoriumtheatre.org

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Alvin Ailey dance company moves forward with resilience, joy

By: Cynthia Perry

January 21, 2024

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

LIVING & ARTS

Sunday, January 21, 2024 | News: livingnews@ajc.com | Delivery: ajc.com/customercare

PERFORMING ARTS DANCE



Alvin Ailey dancers Chavar Montelero and Jacquelin Harris perform in Amy Hall Garner's "Century." COURTESY OF RALL KOLANK

Alvin Ailey dance company moves forward with resilience, joy

Amy Hall Garner's 'Century' helps stay the course amid leadership change.

By Cynthia Perry
For the AJC

Last November, two weeks before the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre opened its 65th anniversary season at the New York City Center, the board of trustees announced that artistic director Robert Battle had resigned for health reasons.

The news struck a hard blow to the organization, said Matthew Rushing, the company's associate artistic director. "I felt for Mr. Battle. It was definitely hard to hear," said Rushing. "But we knew that it was an important decision, and we had to support him. And one of the best ways that we can do that is continuing his work of continuing Mr. Ailey's work."

The guiding principle is "legacy in motion," said Rushing, who is leading the company during this 65th season tour, supported by Ailey's artistic team. "It's having a clear idea of the founding vision, holding on to it and seeing what it looks like as it moves forward into the future."

It's clear in the season's programming for Ailey's national tour, which begins in Atlanta with a three-day run Thursday through Saturday at the Fox Theatre.

Among the varied programs is "Century," a new piece by



Matthew Rushing, associate artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

DANCE PREVIEW

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. Thursday through Saturday. "Century" will be at 7:30 p.m. Friday, 2 p.m. Saturday. \$38-\$98. Fox Theatre, 660 Peachtree St. NE, Atlanta. 855-285-8499; alvinaleiy.org; foxtheatre.org.

INSPIRE ATLANTA REDEMPTION AFTER PRISON

Former inmates lead others on

The path to reentry



James Simmons (left) and Kelvin Boykin of Redemption After Prison serve food at the Sunday morning prayer breakfast for the homeless and hungry at First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta. GAYLE WHITE FOR THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Redemption After Prison provides moral support and microloans to the newly released.

By Gayle White
For the AJC

Just after Christmas 2006, James Simmons stood outside the Five Points MARTA station with no home, no job and no particular plan. For the last quarter century, his life had been programmed: when to get up, when to work, when to go to bed, what to eat, what to wear. Now, he was on his own, abruptly released from the Georgia prison system with \$25, the clothes he was wearing and an obligation to pay for an ankle monitor.

In 1981, when Simmons began his sentence, he was a young man of 23. The MARTA rail line was in its infancy, Ron-

ald Reagan was beginning his presidency, and cellular phones were the fodder of science fiction. Now in his 50s, he felt overwhelmed.

A stranger who sensed his befuddlement showed him how to board the train. With no destination in mind, he steeled his nerve and stepped aboard the first train that stopped. To his great relief, he immediately spotted a familiar figure standing at the other end of the car holding onto a pole.

"Bill!" Simmons yelled, and the two men embraced.

With that encounter — whether by chance or providence — a friendship

Redemption continued on E9

Ailey continued on E8

Ailey

continued from E1

Amy Hall Garner that will likely set the tone for a vibrant future grounded in the Ailey tradition. Garner's first piece for the main company celebrates the 100th birthday of her grandfather, Henry Spooner, highlighting his joy, resilience and love of jazz.

The idea parallels Alvin Ailey, who drew inspiration from "blood memories" from his childhood and growing up, "images and moments that he remembered from his culture," Rushing said. "Revelations," for example, pulled from Ailey's early childhood memories of his Baptist church community in rural Texas.

Garner's music choices — Ray Charles, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and others — reflect the jazz music her grandfather loves. They also align with jazz greats who collaborated with Ailey. But Garner's style reflects her own generation. "It's a new voice talking about her own experiences within the Black culture specifically," said Rushing. "But also, this experience speaks universally."

Garner, who began dancing in Huntsville, Alabama, has forged a wide-ranging path as dancer and choreographer. Her work has taken her from the Juilliard School to Broadway, from contemporary dance companies to New York City Ballet. She's coached Beyoncé. For all these pathways, Garner kept strong ties with Ailey and was recently named an Ailey Artist in Residence.

The idea for "Century" came from pandemic days, when Garner and her family spent 18 months in Spooner's home. Four generations lived under one roof, a circumstance that allowed for deep conversations with Spooner — on aging, on



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre debuts "Century," a new piece by Ailey Artist in Residence Amy Hall Garner. It celebrates the 100th birthday of Garner's grandfather and his love of jazz with music by Count Basie, Ray Charles and Duke Ellington. COURTESY OF RUVEN AFANADOR

parenting, on planning and living a disciplined life, on the prospect of turning 100.

"He's been such an inspiration to me," Garner said of Spooner, whose milestone birthday was Dec. 30. "He's been such an example to me. My son is named after him. He is just that pillar in our family, in his community. He's that rock, and he's the last of that generation with my grandmother and all of their siblings on both sides."

While creating "Century," Garner tapped childhood memories of large family gatherings at her great-grandmother's home in New Roads, Louisiana — a house built on cinder blocks across a gravel-paved road from the levee. There, fresh country air blended with smells of gumbo, spirits and a hint of cigarette smoke, recalled Garner. Jazz, zydeco

and old-school blues music played as her aunts and grandparents danced.

Garner, then 8 or 9 years old, absorbed the rhythms and groove of their dancing. "It had a down-home feel," she said. "It was playful. It was sensual. It had a feel-good kind of spirit," giving her a "sprinkle" of her grandparents' lives when they were young and carefree, she said.

When he was younger, Spooner partnered his wife with "amazing rhythm," said Garner. "He was just smooth all the time."

Choreographing "Century," Garner blended the rhythms and emotions she remembered from those gatherings with her own dance vocabulary that's grounded in ballet, modern and contemporary dance.

She leaned into the grit of Rebirth Brass Band's "Why

Your Feet Hurt," a nod to Louisiana's second-line tradition. She slowed dancers down for Cyrus Chestnut's rendition of "Total Praise," which hearkens to quieter moments when Garner listened to her grandfather rehearse with his church's gospel choir.

Garner melded her style with Ailey dancers' brilliant Horton-based technique, sometimes changing rhythms to give their dancing more punch.

Rushing noted her gift for "pulling more from the dancers, challenging them, pushing them to their limit to see what they can learn in that place."

Christopher Wilson, a native of Augusta, dances a featured role in a number set to Ray Charles' version of "Alexander's Ragtime Band." Garner has challenged Wilson to move with a fleet and explosive speed that's expanded his skill set.

Battle's departure also challenged Wilson. He initially felt shock and grief. But then he spent Thanksgiving at home surrounded by family. He thought about how he could transform those feelings into a performance that would project Ray Charles' exuberant style of showmanship.

"I told myself, you have a job to do, and that is to affect someone in the audience, to change a life somehow," said Wilson. "Even if it's one person, that's more than enough."

That kind of resiliency will help carry the company through its leadership change. Rushing said that whether the new artistic director comes from within the organization as Judith Jamison did, or from outside the company as Battle did, that person must have vision. Beyond that — like Garner — they must understand Ailey.

"That means being able to embody Ailey as an artist, to articulate Ailey's vision to the public, to teach Ailey (in) the school," said Rushing.

Meanwhile, works like "Century" will help the company move forward, solid in Ailey's belief that "the dance came from the people" and should be "delivered back to the people."

It's a mantra that Garner carries wherever she choreographs, because it supports her belief that people come to the theater to be uplifted, inspired and hopeful. "So I hope the next director really anchors their moment in that," she said.

Programming also includes Ronald K. Brown's "Dancing Spirit," Elizabeth Roxas Dobris' "Me, Myself and You," a revival of Hans Van Manen's "Solo" and Kyle Abraham's "Are You in Your Feelings?" reprised from last season. "Revelations" will close each performance.

The New York Times

When Joy and Speed Are on Their Toes

By: Gia Kourlas

December 12, 2023

GIA KOURLAS | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

When Joy and Speed Are on Their Toes

THE DANCERS don't so much step onto the stage in Amy Hall Garner's "Century" as burst within it like a glitter bomb, showering the space in pink and gold. For "Century," her first work for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, performed on Friday at New York City Center, it's clear that Garner doesn't merely know a party when she sees one — she knows how to dream one up. A metallic curtain hangs in the back as dancers, looking like fuchsia flowers, vibrate from their shoulders to their feet like petals caught in a breeze.

Wearing dresses featuring feathered skirts and striped bustiers and, for the men, tight pants and short-sleeve shirts so form fitting that they could be painted on, the dancers are clearly committed to a celebration. But Garner adds another element to their flash: breathtaking speed.

A rising choreographer who will present a new work at New York City Ballet next spring, Garner, here, takes inspiration from her family. She regards "Century" as an

CONTINUED ON PAGE C2

The Ailey troupe presents premieres at City Center, including one featuring a Duke and a Count.



THOMAS A. CLARY/AGENCY FRANCE PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

When Joy and Speed Are on Their Toes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

early birthday present to her grandfather Henry Spooner — he turns 100 on Dec. 30 — and has built a score for it based on his taste, which includes songs by Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Rebirth Brass Band. One section ends with a voice-over by Spooner that speaks to his longevity: "Why my life was extended I don't know and I don't question it. Something must be doing good, I'm still here."

In its opening two numbers, "Basie Land," performed by Basie, and "Alexander's Ragtime Band (Live)," performed by Ray Charles, "Century" is powered by the magnetic, expansive partnering of James Gilmer and Coral Dolphin, and Christopher R. Wilson, whose darting footwork strikes like invisible sparks.

But Garner can also use speed, however energizing, until it wears out its welcome. When Ashley Kaylynn Green — a dancer of absorbing, unaffected ebullience no matter the role — appears in profile at the start of "Why Your Feet Hurt" by Rebirth Brass Band, a different temperament, mercifully, takes over.

Rooted to the floor, Green gives in to the rise and fall of her body as it dips into the music's groove. There are swinging, swimming arms as other dancers join in, including Michael Jackson Jr. and Christopher Taylor, giving their all to the song's title chant. In this section, the sharpest in "Century," all the dancers count. But it belongs to Green who springs up and down from the floor with so little concern for gravity that she seems more spirit than person.

To the spare, gentle "Total Praise" performed by Cyrus Chestnut, the dance takes a more meditative turn. Taylor, balancing on one leg, the other bent at a right angle, rotates ever so slowly; in other moments, which can get trite, he pauses to stare con-



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

templatively into the distance.

But this is, after all, a birthday party — one that kicks into high gear again as the dancers dig into Garner's fast feet and blurred spins. That their bodies remain legible is laudable, but there is a sameness in its adrenaline-junkie pursuit of dance joy. In "Century," the sections seem superficially linked, more by costume (Susan Roemer) and lighting and scenic design (Nicole Pearce) than by choreographic flow. They could almost exist as stand-alone numbers.

A similar theme of looking back was present in Ailey's other world premiere, "Me, Myself and You," a duet by Elizabeth

Top, Coral Dolphin, foreground, and others in Amy Hall Garner's "Century" at New York City Center. Above, Caroline T. Dartey and James Gilmer in the premiere of "Me, Myself and You."

Roxas-Dobrich, a former company member. Set to Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood," as performed by Damien Sneed and Brandie Sutton, the shadowy work, shown Thursday, focuses on the memory of a romance.

Right off, there was a problem: the set. From my seat, it was virtually hidden from view, though somewhere in the left back corner of the stage I could see a gleaming surface. The structure, credited to Roxas-Dobrich and Joseph Anthony Gaito, turned out to be a folding mirror screen.

From the start, the spotlight is on Caroline T. Dartey — this is the woman's story more than the man's — who wears a shimmering long robe by Dante Baylor. Extending a leg forward, she arches back with yearning. (We are in a sentimental mood.) After opening the screen and pressing against its reflection and curling a leg with longing, Dartey turns around and with a buoyant, exuberant leap, finds her way back to center stage.

As if it is a portal from another world, James Gilmer seems to enter through the mirror like mist, swooping in just in time to catch Dartey as she, again, extends a leg into the air and falls into his arms. Her robe slips away to reveal a sheer black dress, which matches Gilmer's loose pants. When he embraces her, she slips out of his arms until all they hold is air.

Repeatedly, they find each other, hooking elbows on occasion, and part ways. And so it goes. "Me, Myself and You" is a slight work, but not just because it's so brief; instead of moving, it's maudlin. When Gilmer slips away for good, the music ends and Dartey ponders her fate in silence.

Thursday also saw a new production of "Solo" by Hans van Manen that made the speed and virtuosity of Chahvar Monteiro,

Yannick Lebrun and Patrick Coker priorities. Each were dashing enough, but as for the dance? Set to Bach, it's packed with cloying gestures — the worst is a shrug — whimsically meant to break the fourth wall.

Ailey's "Survivors," featuring Jacquelin Harris and Vernard J. Gilmore as Nelson and Winnie Mandela, was more soulful in its penetrating look at the anguish of injustice.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
Through Dec. 31 at New York City Center
in Manhattan; nycitycenter.org.

Dancing to Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, they each held their spines with unsentimental power, and Harris, pouring her grief into potent tilts and contractions, was a force.

With each passing season, Harris becomes more expansive, more versatile, more luminous. On Friday, in Kyle Abraham's "Are You in Your Feelings," a love letter to Black culture and music set to soul, hip-hop and R&B, she shimmered, displaying a kind of pedestrian virtuosity in which every ounce of her tiny, eloquent body was the music.

"Revelations," Ailey's 1960 classic, closed both programs with some fine performances, including Akua Noni Parker, the former company member returning as a special guest opposite (the ageless!) Lebrun in "Fix Me, Jesus." Monteiro's "I Wanna Be Ready" held deep pockets of mystery and pain. And in "Sinner Man," Isaiah Day, who, remarkably, is in his final year at Juilliard, rushed across the stage with glittering vehemence. Once you notice him, he's hard to unsee: This is a dancer, somewhere between a boy and a man, and he seems headed for glory.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

[Fresh Footwork From Alvin Ailey](#)

By: Robert Greskovic

December 27, 2023

Fresh Footwork From Alvin Ailey

By ROBERT GRESKOVIC

The 65th anniversary season of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, running through Sunday at City Center, began in late November without Robert Battle, the troupe's artistic director since 2011, at its helm. A world premiere by Mr. Battle, who resigned for health reasons in mid-November, had to be canceled, but otherwise the show went on with only a few programming adjustments.

As the run unfolded, two world premieres and new productions of four dances revived for the season gave the current roster of 38 dancers, including five making guest appearances, plenty of opportunities to shine. Sometimes it was the impact of individual performers, more than their choreographic challenges, that stood out.

Of the world premieres, Amy Hall Garner's "Century" showed more staying power, with its energetic male and female cast of 10 taking inspiration from the accompanying musical selections—seven recorded segments ranging from Count Basie to Duke Ellington—that Ms. Garner chose to honor her grandfather, who was turning 100. The almost breathlessly paced series of solo, duo and group comings and goings began with its men and women, costumed by Susan Roe-

mer, in dance shoes and layered clothing of pinks and golds, and ended with them barefoot, in pared-back outfits as they get down and find a more personal groove.

The other new work, Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrich's "Me, Myself and You," came and went mostly as a slick, one-note affair for a woman who finds herself and a phantom partner in a three-way mirror; leggy Caroline T. Dartey and intense James Gilmer made for a strong first cast, giving more than they're given by their choreography. Accompanied by a recording of Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood," the dance takes form as a sleek, acrobatic adagio that displays its dancers' limberness while largely failing to convey the self-reflection and personal interaction promised in the dance's title.

Of the revivals, Ronald K. Brown's "Dancing Spirit" (2009) lived afresh for its cast of nine as a tribute to former Ailey star Judith Jamison, who became the company's artistic director following Ailey's death and who turned 80 years old this year. One of Ms. Jamison's signature roles had her regally gliding through the "Wade in the Water" section of Ailey's perennially popular "Revelations" (1960), set to traditional spirituals. For Mr. Brown's tribute to Ms. Jamison, Omotayo Wunmi Olaiya designed

various costumes in white with blue detailing that suggests the effects of contact with water.

"Dancing Spirit"—set to a mix of recorded tracks, from Wynton Marsalis to Radiohead—evolves from measured processional paces to freer ones, throughout which one of the women gains prominence by displaying moves familiar from Ms. Jamison's repertory. Wearing a long, flounced-skirt that recalled costuming associated with Ms. Jamison, both statuesque Constance Stamatiou and elegant Hannah Alissa Richardson, in different casts, honored the former Ailey star's particular artfulness with their gestural and full-bodied moves releasing joyful dimensions.

"Revelations" itself—the troupe's hands-down audience and programming favorite, performed to live music on select bills—gave the current dancers a showcase to make their marks. Christopher Taylor, for

instance, was a vibrant, buoyant baptismal celebrant in "Wade in the Water," while Corrin Rachelle Mitchell, in the same cast, invested her dancing with serpentine flexibility in Ms. Jamison's former role, working deftly with the segment's inspired prop, a shimmering parasol.

Kyle Abraham's "Are You in Your Feelings" (2022), set to a mixtape of soul, hip-hop and R&B, prompts the sort of palpable rapport and audible audience delight that Ailey's "Revelations" has long elicited. Dressed by Karen Young in layered, electric-rainbow hues that present the dancers radiantly aglow, and enhanced by Dan Scully's harmonious lighting, the cast's dozen men and women make for beguiling theater with their savvy blend of dance moves, everyday gestures and interpersonal interactions.

Gracing the strong first cast of "Are You in Your Feelings" in particular were Ms. Dartey and Ms.

A scene from Ronald K. Brown's 'Dancing Spirit'



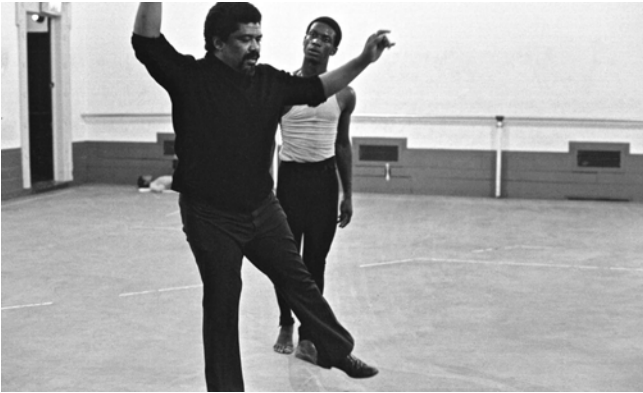
Mitchell facing off to Shirley Brown's "Woman to Woman." Each strikes a memorable figure as the two embody women partly at odds and partly in sync, both physically and emotionally.

Elsewhere, Isaiah Day, an eye-catching newcomer still completing his dance studies at the Juilliard School, gave noteworthy performances, becoming, for instance, a kind of celestial athlete in another of the season's revivals, Alonzo King's "Following the Subtle Current Upstream" (2000). The nine-dancer suite to a three-part mix of recorded music fails to feel whole as it proceeds, but Mr. Day makes his way impressively.

While the Ailey company seeks its next artistic director, its sterling group of dancers remains primed for whatever will be asked of it.

Mr. Greskovic writes about dance for the Journal.

Connecting Dancer Alvin Ailey's Life Story with Classrooms



Acclaimed choreographer Alvin Ailey infused his life story and Black cultural roots into his modern dance works, which have been enjoyed by millions since he first founded Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1958 in New York City. Early dances such as *Revelations* remain favorites in the company repertory today, but many people don't know the background of the artist, who died in 1989.

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and The WNET Group's Kids' Media and Education team have embarked on an exciting new collaboration to bring new video and related educational materials about Alvin Ailey to educators around the country. The new resources use the film "Portrait of Ailey" to connect high school classrooms to Ailey's life story and to provide information on how to analyze and

understand the art of dance. The materials are available on PBS LearningMedia, a dynamic website that offers preK-12 educators access to thousands of resources from PBS stations and partners.

"I wanted to do the kind of dance that could be done for the man on the streets, the people. I wanted to show Black people that they could come down to these concert halls. That it was part of their culture being done there. And that it was universal."

As a public media provider, The WNET Group's mission includes connecting New York City's outstanding arts organizations with audiences nationwide, and to inform, educate and entertain. The film "Portrait of Ailey," produced by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and associated education materials can be used by teachers around the U.S., with guidance on how the resources meet each state's learning standards for grades 9 through 12. The film reveals a thoughtful artist who drew on life experience to create dance, and also followed his curiosity into the unknown. It will be presented in eight parts; two—Alvin Ailey's Texas Roots and Alvin Ailey's California Inspirations—are available now.

Ailey's early years unfolded on the edges of the U.S. before he became a central figure of modern dance, touring the world with his company. He was raised in poverty in 1930s Texas, picking cotton as a small child and loving blues and gospel music. Ailey spent his teenage years in California, studying dance with modern dance pioneer Lester Horton and performing in his early 20s with Carmen de Lavallade and Maya Angelou. He moved to New York City in 1954.



The U.S. government chose Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to represent American dance on sponsored tours in Asia and Australia in 1962, and in China in 1985. Ailey's choreography was broadcast around the globe when he set *Revelations* on the Ballet Folklórico for the opening ceremonies of the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the first Olympics broadcast live and in color. The company tours internationally to this day, performing the works of Ailey and contemporary choreographers.

The new education resources on PBS LearningMedia supports the aim of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to "allow a new generation of students to learn more about Ailey as a dancer, choreographer, celebrity, teacher, social activist, dance ambassador, arts advocate, and supporter of new choreographic voices and visions."

The mission of the Kids' Media and Education team at WNET is to expand minds, ignite curiosity, and help children become confident and caring people. It creates video and interactive projects for multiple platforms, infusing fun with a range of curriculum-based content for kids from preschool through high school. Its projects exploring STEM, social/emotional development, language learning, history, global understanding, social justice, and the arts spark imagination, encourage critical thinking, and reflect diverse perspectives. The Kids' Media and Education team has partnered with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater as well as with the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City, NJ, and the American Classic Orchestra, among other nonprofit groups.

The WNET Group is proud to share New York City's vibrant and unparalleled arts scene and history with young people around the country through PBS Learning Media.

Upfront The A List

6 Life Lessons From Judith Jamison

1 Find Discipline

I've always loved structure. I could find structure with piano, violin and, later, with dance. That discipline—and the discipline of faith—kept me on a straight path.

2 Connect to Genius

After joining the Ailey company in 1965, I was lucky enough to establish a spiritual connection with the greatest artist I've ever met, [company founder] Alvin Ailey. He would show me a step; I would move. There was very little conversation. He was like a spiritual walker.

3 Build It

When I became artistic director after Mr. Ailey passed, I tried to figure out how to fulfill his vision. And it was sitting right in front of me: build our own studio, our own building. We were bursting at the seams. I just wish he were here to see it. There is light inside. You can feel it.



4 Take Care of Your Body

I took care of mine as best I could. When you're older, you can keep it going

with smaller movements: Just sitting here, I'm doing contractions and releases, trying to strengthen my core. You won't be moving as robustly as you used to, but you can still do something.

"If you really love dance, you aim for infinity in what you're trying to do with that instrument called your body."

5 Choose Your Family

My kids are the Ailey dancers, and they grew up right before my eyes. Now they have children, so I have a bunch of grandchildren! They send me pictures of their families, and it's a whole other level of young people—kids, babies being born. Brings a smile to my face.

6 Dress for Success

It's a uniform I've been wearing forever: a black turtleneck that this wonderful designer from Brooklyn makes for me. Thank God I have three of them. [Laughs.] —As told to Elizabeth Zimmer

Judith Jamison, 80, served as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's artistic director from 1989 until 2011, when she took (a very active) emerita status. In November, the company, as part of its 65th-anniversary celebration, dedicated its opening gala to her.

Makeup artist: Andrea Fairweather/Fairweather Faces; Inset: Jack Mitchell/Getty Images

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUVEN AFANADOR

DECEMBER 2023 / JANUARY 2024 7

Judith Jamison on Her Time at Alvin Ailey and the Privilege of Being a Dancer: “There’s Always a Reciprocity to Performance”

By: Brande Victorian

November 27, 2023



2023 is a milestone year for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) and its artistic director emerita Judith Jamison. On May 10, Jamison celebrated her 80th birthday, and on Nov. 29, the dance company will hold its annual opening night gala celebrating its 65th season; founder Alvin Ailey and a group of Black dancers first performed under the AAADT name in New York City in March of 1958.

“Numbers and ages really do matter,” says Jamison, a Philadelphia native who began dance training at the age of 6 at the Judimar School of Dance. “I love when people say, ‘The number doesn’t matter.’ Oh, yes it does when you’ve been dancing most of your life. It matters a whole lot because your body is catching up to what craziness you were doing as a dancer. At 80, everything doesn’t work the same way. And that’s the challenge, finding out, what can I do? What can’t I do? But I’m loving it.”

AAADT will pay homage to Jamison’s tenure as artistic director of the company from 1989-2011 during its November opening night gala and again on Dec. 19 when it premieres its “Pioneering Women of Ailey” program with special performances celebrating her alongside fellow Black women dancers Carmen de Lavallade, Denise Jefferson, and Sylvia Waters.

“One thing I can tell you is I have always been and will always be in awe of one of the most fabulous artists that I’ve ever had the privilege of working with, and that’s Carmen de Lavallade,” says Jamison. “She doesn’t get enough said about her. She’s a total icon. And she’s done everything. She’s been a guest artist with American Ballet Theater, she was doing a one-woman show when she must’ve been 80-something. My hat is off to her.

“When I think of some of the things I’ve done, for me, they’re on a good level,” Jamison adds. “I’m not belittling what I’ve done, but all of us have contributed something very different, and I always consider them to have contributed even more than I have.”

Jamison talks to THR about learning from Ailey, working on Broadway with the likes of Gregory Hines and Mercedes Ellington and how she was discovered.

When you joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1965, did you have a sense that it was the beginning of something great for you?

No, I didn’t have any revelations like that. I was like a kid in a China shop. Agnes DeMille discovered me in Philadelphia. Everybody thinks Mr. Ailey brought me in but it was Agnes DeMille. We did a piece called The Four Marys and my first gig was as a guest artist with American Ballet Theater. So, I’m in New York for the first time. By the time Mr. Ailey saw me at this audition for a Harry Belafonte special that Donald McKayle was choreographing, I thought, “Are you kidding me? This man is calling me to ask me whether I’d be interested in doing this. Yes!” And when I walked into my first rehearsal, I was put very much at ease by James Truitte who I’d seen dance. He was one of the original members of Ailey, and I had seen him perform already. But I walked into this small rehearsal studio at the YWCA on the West Side, at 50th and 8th Avenue, and in each corner of the room, somebody was learning something. My eyes were wide open, and I was fascinated. There was no time to go, “Oh, this is a pivotal time in my life.” It’s only in retrospect that that happened.

Six years later you performed Cry for the first time, a piece Ailey dedicated to Black women that has gone on to be one of the signature choreographies of the company. What do you remember about that night in 1971?

I didn't think anything unusual had happened when the curtain went down, except people kept applauding. We had gotten that before, but not by myself with a standalone solo. So when I did Cry that night, I hadn't run it from beginning to end, so I didn't know what it was going to do to me. And God bless the late Dudley Williams because he saw that it looked like my legs must have been jelly when it came to that last section, and he came from the back of the theater to stage right and just his look and his enthusiasm and how he was using his arms. He was encouraging me, "Keep going, keep going, keep going." They still do that to this day, the dancers, whenever a young woman does Cry. There's so much enthusiasm that at times when I was AD [artistic director], I had to tell them, "Okay, shut it down, y'all. The audience is going to hear you cheering the person on." But that care and that love is there to get you through no matter what. And when the curtain went down, I was on the floor. I literally fell out on the floor. Emotionally, physically, and spiritually it wears you out if you really put your whole self in it. So the curtain went down, there's lots of applause. Of course, as a performer, there's no way they're going to raise the curtain up and you'd be lying on the floor, so I get up and I take a bow, and I kept taking bows over and over until I don't know which number it was, but they were still screaming and yelling.



I still didn't find anything particularly unusual until Mr. Ailey came backstage, and he said, "What I do next? I don't even know if he knew it was going to go where it went because you don't choreograph thinking, "Let me make a hit." You choreograph out of the depths of your soul and your spirit and your honesty and your truth and your gut. And it could fall flat on its face, you know? But it didn't. I was older so it didn't happen to me when I first joined the company and I think that was wonderful, but I still got sucked in because it becomes a whirlwind. Young people don't understand once you reach that level of people really loving you and then the press gets a hold of you, it takes you to places you have never been. People are surrounding you that never surrounded you before. You have to make decisions.

How did you handle that?

I had a lot of guidance. And I still did stupid things, but I had some really good guidance. The agent for the company, his name was Paul Szilard, he died when he was 99 years old. He was marvelous, we called him the last of the impresarios because he was. And he became my agent as well. So there was protection there. We also had a press person in place who had been working with the company for years, and she stepped forward and covered the bases that needed to be covered so I wouldn't get swamped. You have to disseminate between what's real and what's temporary, what will pass in a minute, in a heartbeat. And you can't afford to let your feet come off the ground. Keep your feet on the ground and stop trying to float. You're dancing, you're performing, you're trying to get this message across. It's not your life. To this day, it's still hard for me to get a cab. That keeps you pretty grounded.



How did your experience on Broadway and with other ballet companies compare to your time with the Alvin Ailey agency?

With Broadway, it was a completely different discipline. Can you imagine working with Gregory Hines? That was a real fantasy for me, and it was there every night. That was a very interesting period in my life. I learned a lot, not just from him, but from Mercedes Ellington who was in *Sophisticated Ladies*. There were always people around you that would keep you walking the right way, like bumpers. I call them spiritual walkers. They keep you on that path that you're supposed to be on. When you're performing, that's a privilege, number one. But also, it's a matter of giving, not a matter of going inside yourself so far that nobody knows who you are. There's always a reciprocity to performance. You have to go in, but you have to give it out. You have to give it back because you're not dancing in a vacuum. Just being excellent and people throwing accolades at you is passing. Stage is your heart and soul and mind and the love that you have for people. Mr. Ailey showed that to us right away by demonstration. You could see how much he loves people; he wasn't dancing just to show himself off.

Broadway was eight shows a week of what I thought in the beginning was the same thing over and over and over again. What woke me up was one day I came out on stage and my first entrance was just walking out and meeting Gregory. And he would gesture to me, and his hand would be standing there, and for some reason I was looking at the bottom of his hand instead of the top of his hand because I tripped. My heel caught in my skirt, and I fell flat on my face. First entrance. And that's when you wake up and ask yourself, well number one, where's your head that you can all of a sudden fall flat on your face? That means you're taking for granted that you're doing eight shows a week and thinking that eight shows are the same thing. You're not considering the audience. You're not considering your fellow artists that are dancing. You're not considering the whole entity of performance. It's a completely different discipline than concert modern dance and just as important. And I got straightened out real quick.

Talk about coming back to AAADT and the day you assumed the role of artistic director.

We were in St. Louis in 1988. I was in a restaurant with Mr. Ailey, who had invited me to lunch. He had asked me to come on tour with the company and I knew he was ill. I hadn't been on tour because I'd started the Jamison Project and he basically, just said, "I'd like you to run the company." And I said, no question, "Sure." It was no question because I'd been working with him from '65 and seeing him live since '63 in Philadelphia when I was in college. This man, I loved completely. I absolutely loved him. And when he said that to me, it's like, what do you, you know? That was simply it. And by '89 he passed.

What were some of the biggest challenges stepping into that role?

Well, for the first two years, I wouldn't say there were many because the only thing that was in mind was this is going to stay afloat, and we were going to honor and elevate and make sure history understands who this man was by our existence and by our excellence and by our love for what we do. But it was a whirlwind because when I took over, we were in a lot of debt. A lot of debt. Ironically, the debt was coming from honoring someone else. He was so dedicated to making sure that this person was honored, and that person was Katherine Dunham. In order to put these productions on, it costs a lot of money. And by the time I took over, it was difficult. But when I think back on it, I didn't think, "Oh, how am I going to do this?" I'm doing whatever I have to be doing. I'm already in it. So there's no time to go, "Now what do I do?" It's just, do. I never go down that route. I don't understand why anybody would go down that route because you're not going to get anything done. Most of us want to go back. But if you're in a whirlwind, you don't have time.

Of all of the accolades you've received personally and as part of the company, are there any you're most proud of?



Seeing the company dancers each generation. Every generation that comes speaks to the genius of a man named Alvin Ailey. We're getting farther and farther away from people even knowing him, not seeing him, meeting him, anything, and every generation has to continue the legacy and love it, and if they don't, they need to go someplace else. So the more I see these young dancers who can do so much more technically than we ever could be, I'm inspired to let them. I always am proud of them when they do come to a revelation about *Revelations*, about *Blues Suite*. When that light bulb finally goes on, your dancing changes in ways. And when you're challenged by all the other repertory that's in the company—there's got to be over 200 now because Mr. Ailey did 75 — when you honor that, and you know how important it is to not have your history erased like people are trying to do again. When you realize that you can't have that happen, you can't let anybody do that to you, the way you keep that up is to educate yourself, love what you're doing, be excellent about what you're doing, and keep a good sense of humor. People forget that sometimes.

Mr. Ailey used to remind us if we got too all high and mighty in our heads, "You know you're a dancer?" He'd say it in such a way that wasn't derogatory, but it was loaded with, look, this is a privilege for you to be able to get on stage and make a living doing these things. And you should enjoy that and understand how privileged you are to be gifted with these God gifts that are given to you. So enjoy it. And have some levity.

This article was also picked up by: [Yahoo News](#)

How Judith Jamison Started Dancing for Alvin Ailey

By: Courtney Escoyne

May 2023 Issue (Online: 5/4/23)

from the vault

"Cry is Alvin's work but, when I dance it, it is mine, too," Jamison said in the November 1972 issue of *Dance Magazine* of the iconic solo Ailey created on her. "Dance is a very perfect thing. You give yourself to it, yet you have to prove your power over it.... I have to make it happen!"

Simply Divine

"There is about her an aura of mysticism. She appears onstage, larger than life, more an apparition than a performer, compelling us to look upon her as we might a temple dancer—with a sense of religiosity, of awe." Those were the opening lines of Olga Maynard's November 1972 *Dance Magazine* cover story on Judith Jamison, then in her late 20s and at the height of her powers as a star performer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Her professional start, however, was far from assured: Though Agnes de Mille recruited her to dance *The Four Marys* with American Ballet Theatre when it premiered in 1965, the contract was short-lived, leading Jamison to work nondance jobs (including as a ride operator at the World's Fair) while taking classes and auditioning. "Nothing in my life, until then, had prepared me for rejection," she told *Dance Magazine*. "Every time I was turned down I took it personally." It was at one such unsuccessful audition that summer, for Donald McKayle, that Alvin Ailey spotted her and decided to ask her to join his company. ("You mean, you decided to take me *that* day, the day of the audition?" Jamison asked Ailey when the two told the story of their first encounter to Maynard. "I went home and cried for three days until you called me!" Ailey replied, "Well, I didn't know where to find you and I had to get your phone number from Carmen [de Lavallade] and Carmen was out of town.") Jamison would dance with Ailey for the next 15 years (save for a brief period between 1966 and 1967 when the company disbanded), and returned to lead the company in 1989 as Ailey's handpicked successor. Now artistic director emerita, Jamison, who celebrates her 80th birthday this month, is the recipient of a *Dance Magazine* Award (1972), a Kennedy Center Honor (1999) and a National Medal of Arts (2001), and was inducted into the National Museum of Dance Hall of Fame in 2015. —Courtney Escoyne



[For This Dancer And Choreographer, Black Storytelling Centers Love — Not Suffering](#)

By: Sierra Lyons

September 20, 2023

Jamar Roberts brings stories to life by expressing the beautiful breadth of the Black experience, not just the trauma.

For dancer and choreographer Jamar Roberts, work means more than simply creating movement. It's about recalling pivotal moments throughout history, his childhood and current events, and bringing them back to life. Roberts' passion for Black storytelling is translated through the depth of research he does for each project, amplifying messages of love and tragedy for his audiences. When Roberts dives into often forgotten eras, music and topics, he hopes to learn as much about them as possible to tell each story through dance, with grace and authenticity.

Roberts first got his start as a dancer for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 2002, where he worked his way up to [serving as resident choreographer](#) of the company from 2019-2022. During his time at the company, he created five bodies of work — his final one, "In A Sentimental Mood," debuted last year. The piece fused Duke Ellington's music with experimental and alternative sounds from Rafiq Bhatia of Son Lux, to help dancers tell a story of Black love.

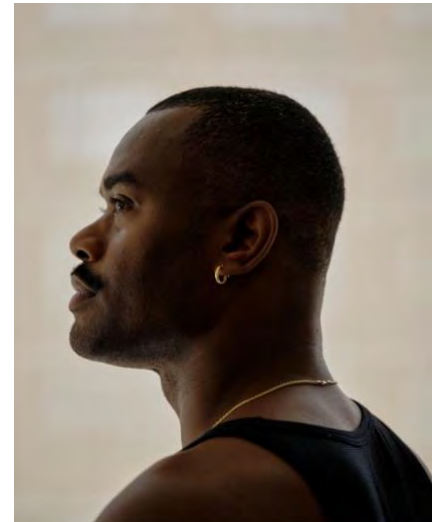
"The story was inspired by a duet in Alvin Ailey's "Blues Suite." There's this sort of tumultuous situation that's happening within that, so I wanted to do a more contemporary take on that in terms of theme, and also movement and vocabulary," Roberts says, about the project. "They're in a lovers' quarrel — and by the end of the piece, she jumps into his arms and they swing off into the wings. So they kind of kiss and make up in the end."

Roberts' work lends itself to conversations about the fixation on Black pain and strife in American film and music — particularly projects that are not helmed by Black artists themselves. Often, art depicting the Black experience fixates on physical and sexual trauma — or it simplifies our culture, devoid of nuance and the complexity of the relationships we cultivate.

That's not to say that period piece films about American slavery or stories about Black grief aren't important. In fact, Roberts has many works that center grief or tragedy.

But pieces such as "In A Sentimental Mood," which shows that Black love can play out onstage without suffering at the center of the story, is not only beautiful but necessary. The project is just one of many examples of the intention Roberts places into his work. And it's proof that Black artists need to be given the space to create work about both joy and despair, and everything else in between.

Roberts describes all romantic relationships — not just Black love — as complicated, and that informs how he shapes a production. "What helped me do that were all the other elements of theater outside of my choreography — the scenic elements, the costuming," he says. "They're dancing on a red carpet, which is symbolic of love, passion and desire. There's





even one moment where the entire piece is flooded with red light. So there is a moment towards the end of the piece where they both kind of see eye-to-eye and come to terms with one another.”

Ultimately, Roberts wants to transport consumers of his work to another place in time, putting them in the headspace to empathize with what’s happening on stage. The Black experience, he reminds me, is multidimensional, and so his work has to be. Another recent project for Alvin Ailey called “Holding Space,” told the story of “radical humility” amid civil unrest and demonstrates the vastness of being Black.

Writers are muses for Roberts, who cites Toni Morrison when he thinks of some of the most powerful influences on his interpretations of love. Her novel, “Paradise,” stands out to him specifically because of its portrayal of female characters; they remind him of the women in his own family. Roberts tells me that he has sometimes drawn from his own family dynamics to help flesh out his stories.



Roberts is part of the Ailey legacy that has always centered Black love in all its iterations. One of the company’s most famous pieces, “Revelations” by Alvin Ailey, utilizes African spirituals and gospel songs to explore both grief and holy joy. Roberts says this story took him back to memories of going to church with his grandmother.

“I grew up going to church with my grandmother all the time, so that entire ballet is so familiar to me, from the hymns that you hear in the music to the costumes that the women wear,” Roberts says. “What was impressive was the way that Alvin was able to capture the essence of church, community, and really the Black experience within that one singular piece. I think that’s a really tough thing to do with dance.”

Roberts is currently working with several ballet companies, blending his background of contemporary and modern style with more methodic movement. It’s both challenging and rewarding, he tells me. And as always, Roberts is observing what’s happening in the real world as he begins to imagine his future projects.

“I always lead with love in a lot of my work, even if it’s not the theme of the actual work — just my love for the dancers who are performing,” he says. “I always try to layer the work so that there’s something really beautiful in it that they can connect to.”

THE CUT

How Alvin Ailey Dancer Constance Stamatiou Gets It Done

By: Brittney Oliver

December 18, 2023



Constance Stamatiou started dancing when she was 5. The Charlotte, North Carolina, native knew at a young age that she wanted to entertain and live in New York City and that dancing could be the catalyst for a career in the spotlight. At 18, she attended the Ailey School, an extensive dance training program, as a fellowship student. She then moved to the Big Apple and joined Ailey II, a junior ensemble for early career dancers. Stamatiou joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 2007 and now, in her 12th season with the company, is living out her dreams as a lead dancer and the face of the company's 2023–24 season.

The 39-year-old trains each day to be less prone to injury and keep her stamina over an eight-month-long season of performing. She doesn't feel the need to keep up with the 20-somethings in the industry as the dancing world is evolving, but she's keenly aware of how her own body has changed. She left the company in 2011 to start her family, returning five years later. "When I was younger, it was rare to see a dancer or hear of a dancer who was past their 20s, especially one who has kids," she said. Being a parent and being older was a career ender at the time, but Stamatiou always felt that Alvin Ailey was an exception that embraced older dancers.

Stamatiou takes pride in being a veteran in the dance company. It was overwhelming to figure out how to show up as a mother and wife, retrain her new body for dancing, and maintain her schedule while finding personal time. But she's feeling better about the work she's doing on herself, and it's showing up in her personal and professional life in a big way. "I feel like a leading lady. I'm not trying to mimic other dancers anymore. I feel like I've stepped into my own," she said. Stamatiou lives in New Jersey with her husband and two children. Here's how she gets it done.

On her morning routine:

I wake up at 7 a.m. and usually get the kids up by 7:15. I typically go to Starbucks for breakfast and get a quick egg bite and a croissant. Sometimes, I eat a Spartan Meal Prep that my husband gets, which helps me because I don't have to go out to get food. I'll have oatmeal that's already prepared. Once I drop off the kids, my husband will drop me off at the George Washington Bridge. I can catch a transit bus across and then catch the A train. The commute is all right as long as there's no accident. I can get to work in 30 minutes.

Usually, once I get to Alvin Ailey, I grab the free AM New York newspaper and do the crossword puzzles. After that, I start to warm up. I try to roll out, stretch, and release my muscles. Then, I do a little conditioning to get the muscles awakened again by doing the floor bar, floor pilates, and some Gyrokinesis before the company's ballet class.

On returning to professional dancing after having children:

I was a newlywed, and my husband and I wanted to have kids when I left. During that time, I was missing Ailey. I was still dancing and teaching here and there, but it just felt like something was missing. My heart kept wanting Mr. Ailey's work. It has so much meaning, so much it was therapeutic. That's when my journey to the gym started because, for one, you've got to get your body back after having two kids. It's not the same. Secondly, I'm now in my 30s.

On her exercise routine:

After rehearsal, I will go catch a class for strength training. I'm lifting weights and paying each part of my body some attention. Strength training is excellent for engaging my core and allowing me to balance more. I do a lot of cardio,

especially for dances like Mr. Ailey's Cry. It is a 16-minute solo, and you're on the stage by yourself the entire time. It does not get any easier as you go toward the end. The pace is being brought up and so is your energy. Cardio is essential to build my stamina. If I don't feel like going to the gym, I go to tae kwon do practice. I took an interest in it when I signed my kids up for classes.

On how she unwinds for the day:

If my day is intense and I'm coming home and feel like I can't walk, I'm in the tub with Epsom salt. I also enjoy having quality time with my family because, by the time I wake them up and send them to school, I don't see them until it's time to go to bed. We like to watch TV together as a family or as a couple. The kids are into Goosebumps, and my husband and I watch Loot on Apple TV+ and Black Cake on Hulu.

On how she manages stress:

I grew up disassociating and just not feeling feelings. I saw it was taking a toll on my body, especially with this kind of demanding schedule. I remember there was a period on tour when many feelings were coming to the surface, and I didn't know how to deal with them. It was great to have a bond with other dancers where I could feel vulnerable enough to vent about my feelings. I was encouraged to start therapy, and I've been speaking with my therapist now for about two years. It's been life-changing and life-saving. It's helped me deal with my feelings and honor myself. I do that once a week, even when I'm on tour. Luckily, I can speak to my therapist through Zoom.

On being a parent with a demanding schedule:

My husband had to play Mom and Dad a lot. Luckily, we have FaceTime. I was able to buy books and read to my kids through FaceTime when they were younger. Nowadays, I'm trying to help with homework through FaceTime. It's challenging. My husband knew this was my passion. He also sensed something missing when I wasn't at Ailey. He and I both said we felt that me dancing again made me a better mom. And, of course, my being a mom made me a better dancer. It was really important to me for the kids to see that childhood dreams can come true. As much as I would go through the guilt of being away for so long, I kept trying to remind myself, They see you do something you love and are proud of you.

On the moment she felt she'd "made it":

I was about 20 years old when I got into the company, so I mimicked what the other dancers were doing and did what I was told, being that good girl and just listening. When I left and returned, I was looking for that same thing. Okay, are you gonna tell me what to do? But now Alvin Ailey's under a new direction, and it's a whole new company. I'm one of the oldest dancers, so I have to be able to do it for myself. It finally paid off this year when they told me I was the featured dancer for this year's poster. I've been here for so long; this is the first time I have been honored on a poster. I wasn't expecting it at all.

On advice she would offer her younger self:

To be more confident in myself and my body. Young dancers end up comparing themselves: This person has better feet, or this person can turn more than I can. We start picking away at ourselves and chipping away at our confidence. That shows in your dance, and you try to hide instead of being vulnerable. I remember being young and my peers had so many opinions about how I should hold my body and move. You end up losing awareness of your own body. But no one can tell you how to move your body because all of our bodies are different. That's the investigation you must do for yourself, and I wish I had been more independent, stronger, and confident to do that earlier. The investigation should never stop, so even if I felt like I made it, I have to continue to study and continue to experiment because who knows how far this body can go?

On the people who help her get it done:

My husband first, and then my kids because they drive me to strive for greatness. I do it for them because I want to be an example. Regarding my time at Ailey, my first director, Ms. Judith Jamison, is a legend. When she comes into the room, everybody pulls up. Then my assistant director, Matthew Rushing, and rehearsal director, Ronni Favors: Matthew helped guide me into the discipline I have now and into becoming a lead dancer; Ronni has seen me grow, and sometimes I look to her when I need a shoulder to cry on and a therapy session.

The New York Times

Ailey's New Secret Weapon: The Heroically Unmannered James Gilmer

By: Gia Kourlas

December 13, 2021

NEWS | CRITICISM

MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2021

Arts
The New York Times



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.

Omicron is not just looming. It's here. Even Gilmer's plans to attend a dance performance just after Thanksgiving were thwarted: Complexions 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. ("An incredibly dear experience," Gilmer

James Gilmer, at the Ailey studios on West 55th Street, is "really nimble in all senses of the word," a colleague says.

NATE PALMER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Bringing His Own Drama Onstage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

said.) He went on an international tour with the company, and finished his first season at City Center. But then the pandemic hit.

What was it like to finally get the job and then have to go into lockdown? Gilmer still might have been getting his bearings, but it was clear from the start that he was a stand-out.

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

But Gilmer's first serious dance language was ballet. Somewhat unusually for an Ailey dancer, he had an impressive 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 attained the rank of soloist.

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. Robert Battle, Ailey's artistic director, recalled being struck by his size and agility, along with his versatility.

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

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

"He's really nimble in all senses of the word," he added, "which is usually just meaning flexible. But I mean something a little more soulful: He's not a peacock, you know? He's very much about the work and about giving himself over to the work in such a wonderful and beautiful way."

Gilmer *could* be a peacock: With his elegant carriage and line, and his scrupulous technique, he could veer toward a more aloof place as a performer — or be a show-off. "He has a wonderful economy with how he shows his colors — his feathers if you will," Battle said. "He's able to meet the



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NATE PALMER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



'Even when I started focusing on ballet, there was a part of me that always wanted Ailey.'

JAMES GILMER



challenges of the different choreographers that come in because he's so open."

Battle was struck when coaching him in Aszure Barton's "Busk" with how Gilmer listened. "His whole body is an ear," Battle said. "You get an immediate response to what it is you're asking him to do. And that may seem simple, but believe me, it isn't."

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

For Gilmer, being an Ailey dancer has to do with being able to convey a story, something he said he has wanted to do onstage his whole life. Finding the drama — and his own personal drama — within a classic Ai-

James Gilmer loosening up in a dance studio at Alvin Ailey. He said that his parents signed him up for dance classes because he was always moving. Now, he sees his role as an Ailey dancer who is able to convey a story.

ley role is not the same thing as being a prince in ballet.

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

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

Gilmer wanted more than "tights-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." He loves working with women in general, he said, including Twyla Tharp, who cast him in the premiere of "Second Duet" opposite Jacquelin Harris, also of Ailey, for her "Twyla Now" program at City Center. During the working process — it was extensive — Tharp told him to train like a boxer.

What did that mean? "Footwork," he said. "Having a sense of lightness on the floor. It's being able to move in any direction and how that correlates to your core and where

things are releasing and also inhabiting your body onstage. Being able to just be in your bones and muscles. And *that's* the performance."

Is that why his feet were especially lithe and lively in "Lazarus," a hip-hop work by Rennie Harris, 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, wasn't exterior, but interior: private, 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 and that urgency to create and to get moving again," Gilmer said. "I've been able to really take that and run with it with everything. There are obviously certain ways of training, but there's so much that she made me realize that I can take into any dancing space and really transform the way that I perform."

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

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

He grew up, essentially, in a world of space, and that gave him a restless spirit: "I feel it generating within me," he said. "It always drew me back to the studio."

As a dancer, Gilmer wants to share it, to be, like the women he's worked with, as generous as possible. "It also almost elevates the responsibility because I've been given so incredibly much," he said. "So to give it back to the audience in that way is really all I ever intend to do."

By: Robyn Grant-Moran

January 28, 2023 (Online 1/27/23)

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

ROBYN GRANT-MORAN

Hannah Alissa Richardson first saw the Alvin Ailey 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 Ailey 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 Ailey (1931-1989) 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 Ailey School.

Seeing works by Ailey 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 chokes up as she relives the joy she experienced seeing the company on stage, and the pride in now being one of it dancers, perhaps inspiring the next generation.

Not long after that fateful night, Richardson auditioned for



Hannah Alissa Richardson, seen performing in Francesca Harper's *Freedom Series*, has been dancing since she was three years old. She will be the sole Canadian performer in her inaugural season with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater when it visits Toronto in early February. ERIN BAIANO

a summer intensive program at the Ailey 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 Ailey School, graduating with honours in 2019. Richardson then danced with Ailey II, the bridging program for dancers between school and a company position.

It was there where rehearsal director Ronni Favors gave Richard-

son 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 Ailey and

Mary Barnett's *Survivors*, a tribute to Nelson and Winnie Mandela, Ailey'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 sup-

ported 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 in the audience where she was 12 years ago: 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 Ailey American Dance Theater is returning to Toronto's Meridian Hall Feb. 3 and 4.

By: J.M. Banks

July 24, 2023

K.C. native lands spot in prestigious N.Y. dance company

BY J.M. BANKS
jbanks@kcstar.com

As De'Anthony Vaughan concludes another long day at dance rehearsal, he navigates his way through the bright lights, bustling crowds and honking horns of New York City. One thing is for sure, he is not on Vine Street anymore.

For many of us, working at our dream job is a far-off fantasy; for Vaughan, his lifelong ambition of becoming a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater became a reality earlier this month.

"I was ecstatic. I am still in

shock. I was overwhelmed, but I am still so happy," says Vaughan, a Kansas City native. "My family is more excited than me. I feel like I was still processing it and they were crying and happy because everyone knows it has always been a dream of mine."

Vaughan, 30, is a product of Kansas City's Friends of Alvin Ailey Youth Camp and a testament to the resources the year-round program provides. Now in its 39th year, the Friends of Alvin Ailey Foundation has been the second home for the prestigious dance company,

SEE VAUGHAN, 5A



KENT BAKER Kent Baker Studio

De'Anthony Vaughan performs a dance with Sierra Jones while dancing with the Dallas Black Dance Theatre.

FROM PAGE 1A

VAUGHAN

bridging the main organization in New York with Kansas City.

"Honestly, if it wasn't for them, I would not be where I am today," says Vaughan, who started taking dance courses with Alvin Ailey in middle school. "When I got to the program it introduced me to other styles and other males who are doing it, and it inspired me."

Encouraged by his grandmother to get involved with dance, Vaughan remembers how lonely it was as a boy. He credits the Ailey Youth Camp with putting him in front of men in the field who encouraged him.

"I have had some great teachers through my years at Alvin Ailey," says the

graduate of the now-closed Brookside-Frontier Math and Science School. "Growing up and being a male in the industry, there is not a lot of us and I had teachers who motivated me and saw that it was possible."

Vaughan attended the camp from 2007 to 2011. After graduating high school, he was accepted into the Alvin Ailey Summer Intensive Program, which allowed him to travel to New York for training the next four summers.

Vaughan has performed in the Dallas Black Dance Theatre for the last nine years. He entered the grueling audition process for Alvin Ailey's main company in March.

Hundreds of high-caliber dancers were given a ballet routine which they only had minutes to learn and perform in front of a panel of judges with no errors.

Vaughan learned in April that he was selected; however, he could only announce it this month. But it was tough for the dancer to keep tight-lipped.

Like other staff at the Friends of Alvin Ailey, Melanie Miller, chief executive officer, says Vaughan's selection into the main company is, of course, the best-case scenario. But that isn't the main goal.

"We don't always expect them all to go off to become world class dancers," says Miller. "It is always wonderful if they do, but what we are really trying to do is create good people who are responsib-

le and lead productive lives. And if they happen to fall in love with dance, that is just the cherry on top."

The foundation offers two youth camps: a six-week summer course and another from October to May. The goal is to use dance, music and creative writing to teach critical life skills.

The program is free for students living in the Kansas City and Kansas City, Kansas school district boundaries who are ages 11 to 14 and in fifth through eighth grades.

The camp provides resources, such as outfits, food and transportation to locations at Lincoln Middle School, 2012 E. 23rd St., and Carl B. Bruce Middle School, 2100 N. 18th St. in Kansas City, Kansas.

"Our mission is to make dance accessible to all, be

a presenter of dance in the community, teach art education for youth and diversity. Those are three things I am very passionate about," she says.

Miller has worked the past four years to promote the decades-old program but says it's a struggle to get youth, especially young boys, interested.

"We visit schools and go to community centers to meet people where they are at," she says. "We do have a small number of boys, and it has been really important for us to try to introduce dance to boys and to say it is OK to love dance and it is actually pretty cool."

Last year the camp introduced a Thursday dance course aimed at boys, teaching them the athletic intricacies of dance and how that carries over into sports, Miller said.

With next year marking the 40th anniversary for the Friends of Alvin Ailey, Miller believes success stories like Vaughan's will only help to convince more youth of the possibilities of a future in dance.

Vaughan is now preparing for a European tour. After years of hard work, discipline and countless nights of aching feet, he hopes the Kansas City dance scene will grow.

"It is all about staying focused and present," says Vaughan. "I feel like I did have a lot of teachers who made sure I knew what it took to get here, and if you work hard everything will follow."

For information on the programs, visit kcfaa.com/aileycamp.

The New York Times

[Spotlight Gets Brighter For an Ailey Dancer](#)

By: Siobhan Burke

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

Spotlight Gets Brighter For an Ailey Dancer

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

By SIOBHAN 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 bladeliike 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, Ailey'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

CONTINUED ON PAGE C13



NATE PALMER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jacquelin Harris joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 2014.

Spotlight Gets Brighter For an Ailey Dancer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1
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, whether shape-shifting under a disco ball in Aszure Barton's "Busk" or leading the solemn, prayerful opening section of the classic "Revelations."

"She's a little bit unflappable," Robert Battle, the Ailey 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 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 missile," he said. "She's direct in 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 Twyla Tharp's exuberant "Roy's Joys," a company premiere opening on 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 ads around town, you might recognize Harris as this year's poster girl, gesturing skyward 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 multicity event 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 Patricia Lent, the Cunningham Trust's licensing director, who worked closely with Harris in preparation for "Night of 100 Solos." That was Harris's first journey into Cunningham's convoluted movement, but you wouldn't have known it, Lent said: "She inhabited the work like it was just waiting for her."

"She does everything accurately and clearly — she does what she's taught to do," Lent added. "But then she finds places within the work to push it and extend it, in a way that people who have worked with Merce for a very long time have learned to do."



KATE PALMER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



PAUL KOLBE

Left, Jacquelin Harris, the literal poster girl for the Ailey dance company. Below left, from left, Harris with James Gilmer and Chalvar Monteiro in "Roy's Joys."

Bachelor of Fine Arts program between the Ailey School and Fordham University.

Adept with numbers, she began pursuing a double major in dance and mathematics. Her touring schedule with Ailey II, which she joined in her senior year, prevented her from completing all the courses for her math degree. But, Battle said, her numerical inclinations still show up in the studio, especially when it comes to deciphering complex music.

"She has this wonderful mathematical mind, and I think she applies that as she receives information," Battle said. "You watch her figure it out, almost like a Rubik's cube." When she's presented with an unpredictable rhythmic pattern, he said, "her eyes light up." (During the depths of the pandemic, Harris passed the time taking a free online course about quantum physics, she said; she also loves a good jigsaw puzzle.)

More challenging for Harris is what she called "an element of character work that we do a lot here, where you have to pull something outside of yourself and bring it into the work, to take it to that next level." Mining that kind of motivation, she said, "to the point where it projects onstage, and shows through my body — that takes more exploration, which keeps it interesting."

If anyone can stretch a dancer of unassailable skill to new heights, it's the exacting Tharp. "I love working with Twyla," Harris said. "If everything permits, I'll work for her as many times as she calls me."

In both of her projects with Tharp outside the Ailey company, Harris has performed with her fellow Ailey dancer James Gilmer: last year in "Second Duet," a work of uncompromising physical demands and mutually heroic partnering, and this year in the scintillating "Softly as I Leave You," from "Nine Sinatra Songs," which also requires extreme trust between partners.

As Harris's other half in these works, Gilmer has been drawn to her fearlessness onstage, "the abandonment in her dancing," he said. In "Softly," which the two reprised at the Ailey gala this year, "she just goes for it every time and trusts me so much. We rock it out, and it's really fun."

Harris is now in the process of learning Ailey's celebrated "Cry," a solo that's something of a rite of passage for women in the company, dedicated to "all Black women everywhere — especially our mothers." And while she doesn't plan to retire anytime soon, she is laying the groundwork for when that day comes. In January, she'll begin remote courses in a program of Columbia University's nursing school, which offers prerequisites for degrees in various health professions.

Still, she's staying curious and open about where her path could lead.

"Maybe I'll start learning microbiology," she said, "and decide I want to go do something completely different."

To an extent, Harris, who has a reserved but assured demeanor, recognizes a certain facility within herself: the effortless way 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" — she said before pausing to consider her words, placing 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 for fun) at a local studio, Dance Productions, then moved to New York to study in the joint

Feeling the Beat

By: Courtney Celeste Spears

May/June 2019 Issue

DANCER TO DANCER
• off the record



Samantha Figgins

FEELING *the Beat*

As told to Courtney Celeste Spears

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

Samantha Figgins is currently in her fifth season with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (and was a Dance Spirit cover girl back in 2013!). 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



Performing at the Kennedy Center in high school during her residency with Dance Theatre of Harlem

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

DANCER TO DANCER *off the record*

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. **DS**

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



(Third from left)
Performing Wayne
McGregor's *Kanros* with Alvin
Ailey American Dance Theater

[FROM TOP] ANDREW ECCLES; COURTESY SAMANTHA FIGGINS; [2] COURTESY SAMANTHA FIGGINS; PAUL KOINIK, COURTESY ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

FINANCIAL TIMES

Alvin Ailey documentary divines the choreographer's 'blood memories'

By: Laura Cappelle
December 22, 2021

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-tonks 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 Langage*, 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

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

[‘Ailey’ Review: Peeking Behind the Curtain of a Choreographer’s Creative Mind](#)

By: John Anderson

January 7, 2022 (Online 1/6/22)

TELEVISION REVIEW | JOHN ANDERSON

A Peek Behind the Curtain Of a Creative Mind

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 Wignot’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 onetime collaborator suffered the “demon” that often torments those who rise from humble origins to great heights. “If I’ve got-

ten 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. Wignot’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. Wignot 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 Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, through the late ‘80s, when Ailey died of complications related to AIDS, is evoked in a



Dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey (foreground) in a production of ‘Blues Suite’

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. Wignot has deliber-

ately 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 book-end 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

The New York Times

Special Sunday Insert: Perpetual Motion

By: Zadie Smith

April 14, 2019

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 incomprehensi-

ble 400-year-old text, and so on. To be permitted to hear the thickly stacked, honeyed gospel of "Wade in the Water," while simultaneously watching those idealized, muscular arms — in every shade of brown — slowly rise and assume the shape of so many ancient amphoras! Heaven. And then below the regality and poise of the upper body, beneath the waist, there continued the bastardized bump and grind from MTV, coming full circle to meet its call-and-response West African roots. Everywhere you looked: sensory pleasure. In place of the saccharine costume confections of "The Nutcracker," here were down-home, flowing, church-white gowns, stunning against so much shining dark skin, and redolent of the American South, a dream place I'd visited only in books and song. It dawned on me that I was watching neither high nor low culture but rather a wholly unified thing.

Ailey's all-encompassing vocabulary included the athletes from the running tracks and the fly-girls from the videos, the swaying of church ministers and the hip-switching of Caribbean dance hall and carnival. A diaspora of movement, in short. All fingertips stretched to the sky, all leaps seemed weightless, the whole logic tended upward. "*Didn't my Lord deliver*

Daniel well?" asked the gospel choir, and then pushed the question further from the biblical to the political: "*Then why not every man?*" Deliverance. From shackles, from oppression, from stereotype and misidentification, from prejudice, from any form of restraint, even that proposed by gravity. Toward freedom. (I note that in the photo the minister is the only one encumbered with shoes.)

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

AFTERWORD

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

VERONICA CHAMBERS, editor, *Past Tense*

THE MAGIC OF *REVELATIONS*

BY JEN PETERS

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



AAADT in the opening section: "I Been 'Buked"

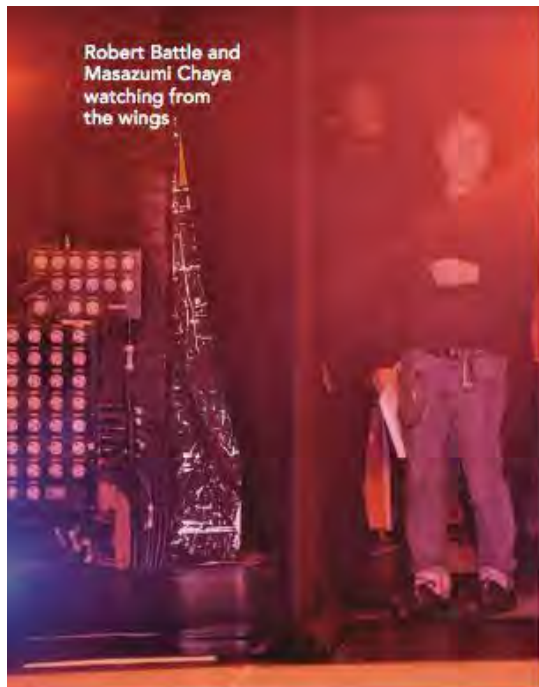
In 1960, America was in the midst of a social transformation. The Supreme Court had ruled "separate but equal" unconstitutional six years prior, but the country's response was slow and turbulent as desegregation incited violent responses. Surrounded by powerful civil rights momentum, a 29-year-old Alvin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

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

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

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

Robert Battle and Masazumi Chaya watching from the wings



THE BIRTH OF A MASTERWORK

While creating *Revelations*—one of his earliest works—Ailey 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,” Ailey described in his memoir *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*. 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 Ailey, and live musicians. “The theater was packed,” recalls Sylvia Waters, a former Ailey II director, and current director of the Ailey Legacy Residency. “I was in the balcony, and when the curtain came down there was a moment of silence and then an eruption of clapping, stamping...it was huge!” The original version was a full hour, which Ailey 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, Ailey 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, Ailey’s hopeful message continues to spread. “Alvin Ailey 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 Ailey 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

“Once, 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. Ailey 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

The “yellow section”



REVELATIONS AS TEACHER

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

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



Linda Celeste Sims and Glenn Allen Sims in "Fix Me, Jesus"

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

Jacqueline Green as the umbrella woman



WHEN JUDITH JAMISON GOT "DEMOTED"

"The first two and a half years my favorite section was 'Fix Me, Jesus,' with Jimmy Truitte. 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

DANCERS' FAVORITE SECTIONS

YANNICK LEBRUN: "I Wanna Be Ready"

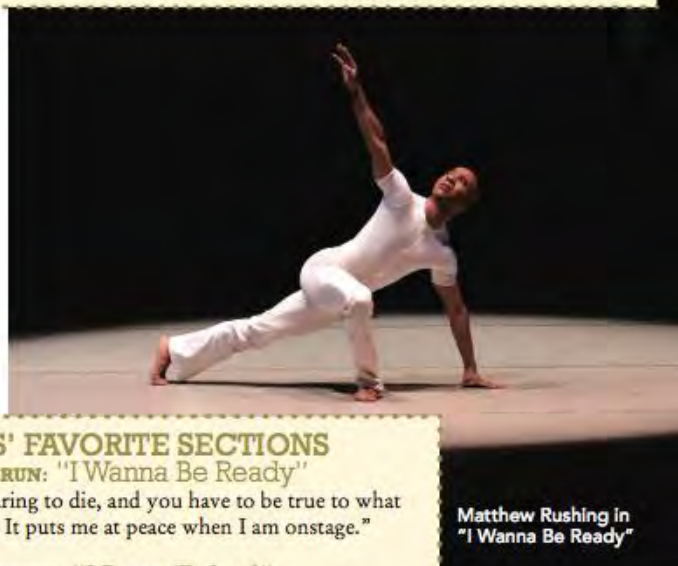
"You are preparing to die, and you have to be true to what the emotion is. It puts me at peace when I am onstage."

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."



Matthew Rushing in "I Wanna Be Ready"