

the 2010 *Dance Magazine* AWARDS

November 2010

There's something luscious about honoring the greats among us. It gives us an opportunity to bask in their accomplishments and to realize how much richer our world is with them in it. This year the Dance Magazine Awards go to a beloved writer, a modern dance star, a groundbreaking collective, and a cherished keeper of the classic flame.

Matthew Rushing

Matthew Rushing moves like butter. He blends beautifully in any group, but as a soloist has a presence that simply rocks. During his 18-year tenure at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, he has shone in such works as Ailey's *Revelations*, *A Song for You*, *Blues Suite*, *Pas de Duke*, *Reflections in D*, to name only a few. In "Sinner Man" from *Revelations*, Rushing's limbs slice the air so sharply that he leaves a trail of air streaks; in "Wade in the Water," he buckles his knees, giving in to the call of a true baptism. Then there is *Reflections in D*, where he glides like a pebble across a very still pond. The audience wants to close their eyes, to be inside his body, to move with him, but no, their eyes are open—nothing is missed. In every role, Matthew Rushing gives a sense of deep humanity, illuminated by an inner light.

A native of Los Angeles who since the age of 13 has had a passion for dance, Rushing began training with Kashmir Blake in an after-school program. Recognizing his keen need for dance, his mother (both parents are ministers) managed to procure two tickets to a sold-out performance of AAADT where he saw Ailey's signature works *Revelations* and *Cry*. He was completely smitten. Soon after, he enrolled at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts and auditioned for The Ailey School his senior year. The judges included three strong

women: Judith Jamison (artistic director of AAADT), the late Denise Jefferson (director of The Ailey School), and Sylvia Waters (artistic director of Ailey II, then called Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble). They loved him. They awarded him a full scholarship and invited him to join the Repertory Ensemble. After just one year—before completing the requisite two-year contract—he was invited to join the main company.

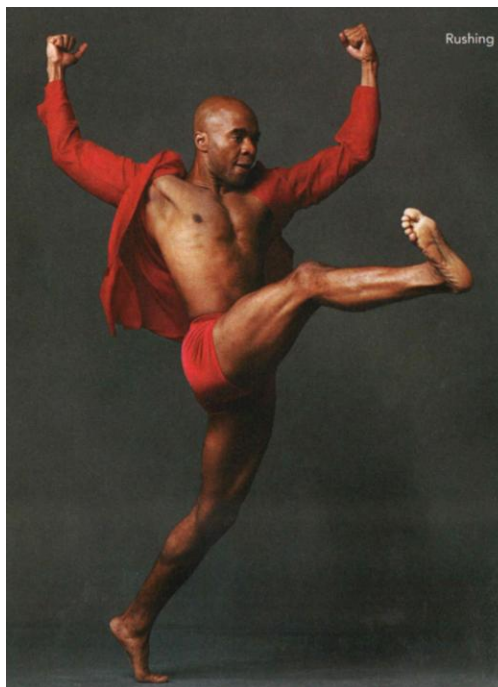
Rushing joined the company in 1992. Within five years, he was pushed toward a lead position because stars like Desmond Richardson and Aubrey Lynch II were leaving and he had to "take on their load." He was chosen to dance Ailey's *Love Songs* (1972), the male equivalent to *Cry*, a role which he says was "rewarding and spiritual." After waiting his turn for eight years to perform solos in *Revelations*, he remembers crying from the beginning to end because he realized "why they made me wait."

In 2005 he co-choreographed his first work for AAADT, *Acceptance in Surrender*, a collaboration with company members Hope Boykin and Abdur Jackson. In 2009 he choreographed his own work, *Uptown*, a tribute to the Harlem Renaissance, which will be included in the Ailey season at New York City Center next month.

Rushing was recently named rehearsal director of AAADT. This year will be his last as a full-time Ailey performer. In the new role, he insists that he does not want to stop dancing. "I have to ease into the position," he says. "I need to focus and can't do both jobs completely. I'm the person giving the directions now and I have to pay attention."

It seems fitting that after 18 years of giving so much of himself, Rushing would be in a position to continue the Ailey lineage, with passion and compassion, into the future.

—Charmaine Patricia Warren



Andrew Eccles, Courtesy Ailey