

rogue ballerina

Another Daley in Chicago

April 10, 2012
By Vicki Crane

In middle school, Sarah Daley came to Chicago's Auditorium Theatre (ATRU) to see Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) perform. She left inspired, but never anticipating that a few years later, at 25, she would be getting ready to perform on that very stage as part of the acclaimed company. "It's so crazy. It's very surreal the closer I get to it," she said. "Especially dancing at the Auditorium, because that's where growing up I got to see all these amazing companies. To be on that stage is going to be great." Tomorrow night, Daley will take the stage with her fellow AAADT dancers for opening night of a six performance run. *Dreams* – with a lot of hard work – really do come true.



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater dancers in *Revelations*. Photo by Christopher Duggan

Daley grew up in up in South Elgin and started dancing at the Faubourg School of Ballet in Hanover Park. When looking for colleges (her Mom said not going to college was not an option), a dance program was paramount. She ended up at Fordham University which has a partnership with AAADT. After two years dancing with Ailey II, she's now in her first season with the main company. This is also the first season under new artistic director Robert Battle. While traditional Ailey pieces like *Revelations* are still in the rep, Battle includes his choreography but is also bringing in different styles of work to challenge the dancers and the audience. On the Chicago programs are works from Ailey, Battle, Rennie Harris, Paul Taylor and Ohad Naharin.

I spoke with Daley over the phone earlier this week. The company arrives in Chicago today.

Did you always want to be in Ailey? Was this your goal?

It was definitely a goal. I wasn't sure how realistic it was...it seemed like a long shot, but it was always something that I really wanted to do. I was going to do everything I could do to make that happen.

It's an exciting time with the company going in a new direction. What's it been like for you?

Like you said, it's really exciting. There's this air around Ailey everywhere we tour, everybody knows it's the beginning of a new chapter. Everyone is excited to see what Mr. Battle is bringing. He's a great person to be around. He has a really great energy that's trickled down into the company and how we work with each other. It's good to be a part of it.

Has it been challenging changing the rep to include a Paul Taylor or Ohad Naharin piece? For instance, Ohad's work is so particular. Was it hard for your body, since you aren't used to his technique?

It was difficult in the rehearsal process. Some things came easier for some people. "Arden Court" was a bit more natural for me. It seemed more familiar than "Home". I've never been a hop hop dancer. I love that whole genre of dance, but I'd never done it. "Minus 16" was just totally new for everybody. It was research – a total investigation, pare down of everything you know and start from the beginning with a new language. It was definitely something to get used to, but it was a lot of fun. It made "Minus 16" a lot easier to transition into once we'd started learning his way of moving.

Tell me about the Rennie Harris piece, *Home*.

We had a three-week workshop when he came in to set the piece. A lot of people weren't hip hop/house dancers and he wanted it to be authentic and not us just mimicking the moves he would teach us. We learned the basic house language for the whole time he was there. It was inspired by people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. I think it's more of a celebration of life and music and dance than it is anything else. When you're inspired by a topic like that, it can get really dark and heavy, but he wanted it to be about the music and the dance. It's a club setting, so we're almost in a trance at times. I really enjoy doing it. It's so much fun and you get to relax on stage. The audiences everywhere we've gone really love it.

Can you describe to me what it feels like to do Revelations. It's such an iconic work. What's it like to actually be doing it?

It's definitely an experience, especially the first few times you do it. You're excited and thinking about the history of the piece and how many people have done it before. I pretty much do it every night, so there's always another chance to investigate and get deeper into it. Sometimes it's good to take a break and watch it from the audience, so you remember why everyone loves it so much. You get the full effect of it, so when you go back, you have something to work with. It's really an experience to do such an historical work.

Recently on the [Ailey Facebook page](#), they asked the question: what is your favorite section of Revelations? What's yours?

My favorite section to do is "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel". It's short and gets right to the point. It's high energy. I don't know why – out of all the sections – when I do it, I really feel like I've made an impact on the audience when I do it. I really enjoy doing it. My favorite to watch is "I Wanna Be Ready". It has a lot to do with the people I get to watch do it. Being able to watch Matthew Rushing from off stage do this piece is ridiculous.

Your bio includes this quote: "Dance for me is becoming more and more about discovery and imagination." Can you explain that?

I started to think about this in Ailey II when we started to tour and perform a lot...to think of ways to keep what I'm doing fresh, not just for me but for the audience. If a dancer is over what they're doing, the audience totally feels that. I've been trying to go a little deeper with everything I do. I can focus on something different in "Minus 16", every time I do it. That's been my discovery and revelation in a way.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre – April 11 – 15 at the Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress Pkwy

Tickets are \$30-\$90. Call 800.982.2787 or visit ticketmaster.com/auditorium.