

THE AILEY. EXTENSION

Press Contact:
Nyrie McKenzie
nmckenzie@alvinailey.org
212-405-9079

Lisa Johnson-Willingham Named as New Director of The Ailey Extension

Popular Dance Program Benefits from Longstanding History of Former Ailey Company Member

(New York, NY) February 1, 2011 - The Ailey Organization announced that Lisa Johnson-Willingham, a former dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, has been named Director of The Ailey Extension. During her 18-year history with Ailey, Johnson-Willingham's roles have transcended the stage to also include leadership positions as choreographer, teacher and educational program Director. Over the past decade, while heading AileyCamp Chicago summer programs, she has also directed area high school and college dance programs.

"We are thrilled to welcome Lisa home," stated Artistic Director Judith Jamison, who first met Johnson-Willingham 25 years ago as a member of the Jamison Project. "She has had a remarkable impact as a performer, teacher and mentor. I'm confident that her awareness of the Ailey legacy and influence both on and off the stage will enrich this innovative program and further The Ailey Extension as the nation's destination for dance."



Johnson-Willingham's history with the Ailey organization began in 1993 as a member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. While in the Company, Johnson-Willingham also choreographed *Restricted*, a work which premiered on the Company during its 1998 New York City Center Season. Two years later, she traveled to Chicago to head AileyCamp - an innovative summer program designed to serve inner-city children in grades six through eight - where she held a position as Director for ten years. Fittingly, Johnson-Willingham's evolving roles in the Ailey organization and dedication to ensuring dance is accessible to everyone will continue with The Ailey Extension.

The Ailey Extension was created in 2005 under the leadership of Executive Director Sharon Gersten Luckman to further the legacy of Alvin Ailey by delivering "dance back to the people" through an array of public classes offered in all levels at the nation's largest building dedicated to dance - The Joan Weill Center for Dance. The program has tripled in size since its inception, offering classes to over 42,000 students. "When I launched The Ailey Extension program, my vision was to create a new way for dance enthusiasts to enjoy 'the Ailey experience' in a welcoming, non-competitive environment," explained Sharon Gersten Luckman. "I'm certain that with Lisa's creative leadership and forward-thinking approach, The Ailey Extension will continue to expand and thrive, bringing the joy of dance to New Yorkers and visitors from around the world."

Starting February 3, 2011, as Director of The Ailey Extension, Lisa Johnson-Willingham will supervise and manage over 50 world-class faculty members, guest instructors and staff. Her responsibilities will also include developing and implementing innovative dance and fitness classes, special workshops, group and private classes and summer programs to build the The Ailey Extension's weekly schedule.

"The Ailey Extension is such a key component of the Ailey mission," Johnson-Willingham affirms. "Opening the doors of the Ailey studios to the public gives *everyone* the opportunity to find fun in fitness and express themselves through dance- whether you're age 3 or 93!"



Lisa Johnson-Willingham pictured with AileyCamp Chicago Students. Photo by Claude-Aline Nazaire

Lisa Johnson-Willingham, born in Washington, DC, is a graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and received a BFA from The University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Lisa has performed with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, New World Dance Company, Donald Byrd/The Group, Joel Hall Dance Company, Deeply Rooted Productions, Cerqua/Rivera Art Experience, Nucleus Dance Collective and Complexions.

As a choreographer, Lisa has set pieces on such dance companies as Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Joel Hall Dance Company, Cerqua/Rivera Art Experience, Melissa Thodos and Dancers, One World Dance Theater and Hubbard Street II.

Lisa's leadership experience in the arts includes a decade-long position as Director of AileyCamp Chicago, heading dance programs at the Dance Conservatory of Chicago High School for the Arts and Whitney Young Magnet High School and teaching positions at Columbia College, Olive Harvey College and Academy of Dance.

###

ABOUT THE AILEY EXTENSION

Since its inception in 2005, The Ailey Extension has been fulfilling Alvin Ailey's mission of delivering dance back to its origin, the people, by offering "real classes for real people". The Extension offers over 80 classes per week in over 30 different dance and fitness techniques for all levels. Over 42,000 people have taken classes at Ailey's home – the nation's largest building dedicated to dance. It boasts 12 spacious studios with floor to ceiling windows and views of the New York City skyline, providing a space where dancers of all levels and walks of life can learn and be inspired – body, mind, and spirit. For more information on The Ailey Extension, please visit www.aileyextension.com.

The Ailey Studios are located at The Joan Weill Center for Dance, home of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, at 405 West 55th Street (at 9th Avenue).