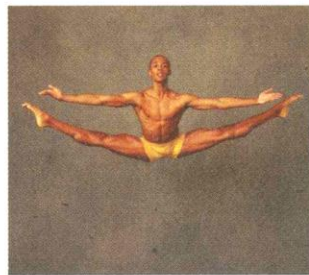
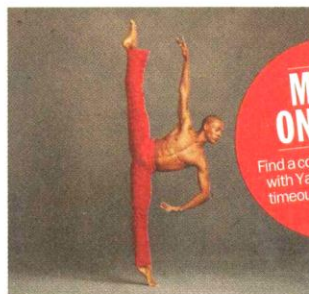
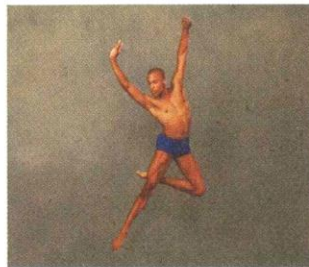
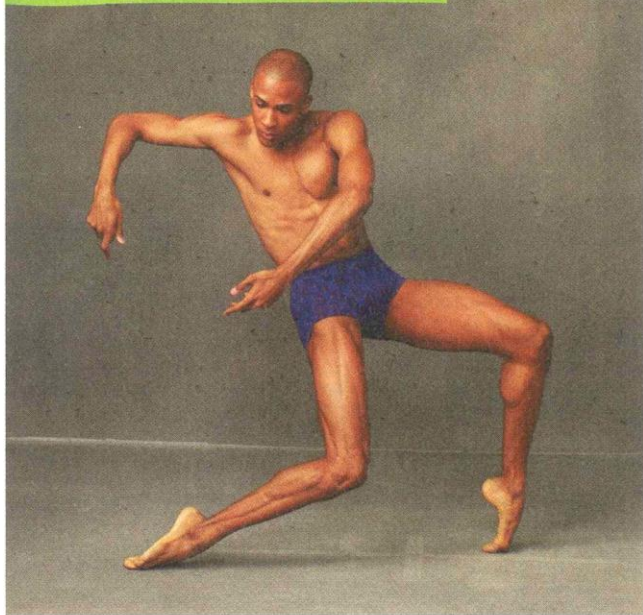


November 22-28, 2012

Dance
Edited by Gia Kourlas • dance@timeoutny.com



MORE ONLINE!
Find a complete interview with Yannick Lebrun at timeout.com/newyork.

What do you think of this Ailey season?

To work with Robert Battle in his second season as artistic director is exciting. It's fresh air. Ailey is going in a new direction, and this season is going to be *very* exciting. Every season has been good, but this one is special.

Why?

Petite Mort on a modern dance company! [Laughs] The excitement of bringing a ballet like that to this company is to show the younger generations and people who think that ballet and that style is not accessible and possible for our kinds of dancers and bodies. We still have mentalities like that. For Robert to bring a ballet like this to Alvin Ailey is to show that Ailey dancers can move like that and use their training and be versatile. We add something different to the ballet. Of course, we still respect the aesthetic and the story that has to be revealed, but Ailey dancers move differently.

Why is that?

It's because of performing other works and reaching deeper doing Ailey works—we have very strong, emotional work in our repertory. Having to inspire people makes us approach everything that we do with a certain sense of humility, sensitivity, strength, athleticism—that's what Ailey is about. That's why now, when people come and set work on Ailey, they're blown away by where we take it and by the decisions that we make onstage, which sometimes are not made by ballet dancers.

What has Battle spoken to you about in terms of your dancing?

Sometimes he tells me that not everything has to be presentational. That I can be a little more relaxed in my upper body and use a little more quirkiness; that can be beautiful also. I'm working on that, and it's making a change. I know that I don't always have to make it look beautiful to make it seem beautiful to the audience. It can be awkward, but also beautiful.

What dances are you performing this season that might allow you to practice being less presentational?

From Before. In using West African steps or Caribbean steps and influence, you really have to get down and feel the beat. It's not always about being pretty or turned out or about the technique. And maybe *Grace* also. I'm at the point in my dancing where I don't want to hear the same kind of feedback, like, "Oh my God, Yannick—your physique, your legs"—my interest now is in hearing what people felt. I'm trying to go to a different place.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is at New York City Center Wed 28–Dec 30.

Yannick Lebrun

This crazy-great dancer is nuts about Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. By **Gia Kourlas**

On December 11, during the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater season at New York City Center, Yannick Lebrun will turn 26. He has the night off. "To be honest with you," he whispers conspiratorially, "I wanted to dance." Lebrun, one of the Ailey company's most elegant members, considers dancing to be his daily multivitamin. Raised in French Guiana, where he began his training at the age of nine, Lebrun kicks off his fifth season with Ailey in the opening-night performance of "Sinner Man" in *Revelations*. He's also cast in several new works, including Garth Fagan's *From Before*, Kyle Abraham's *Another Night* and Jiri Kylian's *Petite Mort*. (He's practically in raptures over that last one.) Lebrun spoke at the Ailey complex during a break from rehearsals.

Why did you start dancing?

My cousin invited me to one of her dance competitions. I was blown away. I always loved moving and dancing; growing up in South America, it's part of the tradition and

the culture, but to gain technique was very interesting to me. I wanted to do that.

Were you tall when you first started? What was your facility like?

I was not that tall, and I didn't have everything that I have now. People might be surprised, but I really had to work hard to get to that level. I'm still figuring it out right now. I know I'm not at my best. But I was not that tall, and I did not have all the flexibility and the strength that I have now. I also gained confidence, especially when I came to America—to America in general, not only to the Ailey school.

Why? What was it like at home?

Dance is not something that people do in French Guiana. People don't really go to ballet class—it's kind of taboo. You're a dancer, but are you still going to go to college? How are

you going to survive? And then to dance means you have to go to France, and I was like, I know I am not going to find what I want in France. How I wanted to see myself was not in a very closed box, where it's only ballet or a certain kind of contemporary dance. *Danse contemporaine*, they call it. That was

"I'm still figuring it out right now. I know I'm not at my best."

not my style. And I didn't want to be a ballet dancer. France has its racial issues also. I don't want to say *racism*, but there is nobody that gives a big place to black dancers in France and in Europe, so that's why I was like, Let me try America. All my friends said, "Wow—you're going to America right away—that's so risky!" I was like, "I know, but that's who I am and I have a dream, and I'm going to make sure I become a professional dancer. New York is where I'm going to find myself as a dancer. Going to France is not going to help me. *No.*"