

Chicago native Aqura Lacey Returns Home for a One Night Only Performance with Ailey II at Governors State University's Center for Performing Arts Friday, Oct. 28 at 8 p.m.

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By Shanae Mitchell



Chicago native and Ailey II dancer Aqura Lacey performs at Governors State University's Center for Performing Arts Friday, October 28 at 8pm. Photo by Eduardo Patino

“Audience members don’t know the names of the different techniques; they just know how they feel. So I try to stay as honest and human as possible. And I never forget where I came from.”

Familiar to Chicago audiences through their sister company Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s annual spring performances at the Auditorium Theatre and returning to Governors State University by popular demand, Ailey II performs at The Center Friday, Oct. 28 at 8 p.m. Chicago’s own Aqura Lacey, currently a senior at Fordham University, will grace the stage for this special performance. Tickets range in price from \$15 to \$53, and student tickets for this family-friendly show are \$28. Tickets are available by calling (708) 235-2222 or at www.centertickets.net.

Lacey is careful to balance her passion for dance with her education. She received the Wittenberg Scholarship from the Fund for the Arts Foundation to help supplement her education in the Ailey/Fordham BFA program. “It’s difficult with having school every day and long rehearsal hours... but you find a way and just do it.”

Though raised for the majority of her life in Louisville, KY, Lacey was born in Chicago and claims the city as her home. A native of the Englewood neighborhood, this homecoming has a special place in her heart. “My family rarely has the chance to see me perform, so the fact that Ailey II is coming to my hometown means a lot. Everything is coming full circle.”

When Lacey began dancing 10 years ago at the Kentucky Centers ArtsReach program at Louisville Central Community Center under the direction of Geraldine Woods and mentor Aundra Lafayette, she never imagined that it would become a career that she is passionate about. “When I first started dancing, I didn’t like it; it was just something to do after school. Then I started to like it, and over time I learned to love it. And so here I am today, thrilled to be a member of Ailey II.”

When she first started dancing, Lacey was practicing the “loose modern” dance form and she was accustomed to dancing with peers that looked like her. When she began her studio ballet training at the Louisville Ballet School as a scholarship recipient, that was the first time she experienced diversity in the dance world. “When I started at the studio with ballet, I was the only African American girl there. In my head I was thinking... ‘There’s not too far I can go’.

When I saw Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform for the first time, it combined everything I used to do at church and community centers with what I was learning now at the studio and it just connected all the dots. It showed me there was a place for me, a place I could go, see the world and deliver my message... to be a part of something bigger and make a difference.”

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s performance of “Revelations” had a strong impact on Lacey. “I love ‘Revelations’. That was the piece that moved me the most. It feels like home... it had the church spirit, that old school feeling. It was just honest.” Lacey joined Ailey II earlier this summer, and had her first overseas performance not long after. It was this performance in Marseilles, France, that she cites as her career favorite, which showed her how universal dance is. “We were in a different country, and everyone around us was speaking a different language. When we danced, our movement and spirit spoke a universal language that the audience was able to understand.”

To be able to give so much of herself through movement and to connect with the audience are the things Lacey loves most about dance. "Dance requires a lot of discipline and commitment. You use every part of your body and tap all of your emotions. There's no finish line; it's something you're constantly working on... portraying different feelings, having something work for you in a different way... there's always something more you can do. Audience members don't know the names of the different techniques; they just know how they feel. So I try to stay as honest and human as possible. And I never forget where I came from."

At Governors State University, Ailey II will perform:

- The Chicago premiere of "Reference Point" (2011) choreographed by Ailey II Associate Artistic Director Troy Powell.
- "Echoes" (2008) choreographed by Thang Dao. "Echoes" began as a depiction of haunting memories, but this poignant ballet has since taken on a life of its own; the echoes of memories cascade into the distant past while pervading our awareness of the present.
- Alvin Ailey's masterpiece "Revelations" (1960). Using African American spirituals, song-sermons, gospel songs and holy blues, this suite fervently explores the places of deepest grief and holiest joy in the soul. Alvin Ailey said that one of America's richest treasures was the cultural heritage of the African American: "sometimes sorrowful, sometimes jubilant, but always hopeful." This enduring classic is a tribute to that heritage and to Ailey's genius.

"The three different pieces we are performing show different sides of us. They show that we can do anything together. To share that with people that don't usually get to go out to see it, don't usually get to witness what we go through everyday... it's one of my favorite parts of the show," explains Lacey.

Ailey II is the sister company to Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; it is a transitional company made for young dancers with big dreams to go from being a student to a professional dancer. Ailey II also does a lot of community outreach and work with kids including hosting demonstrations and classes. In love with the spirit and unity of Ailey II, Lacey would love to make the leap to the first company, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. She plans to do this by following her own advice to other young, aspiring dancers: "Stay focused, remain grounded and think outside the box. Create your own pathway and always remember where you come from."

If you go...

Ailey II comes to The Center for Performing Arts at Governors State University Friday, Oct. 28 at 8 p.m. Single tickets range in price from \$15 – \$53. Tickets are available by calling The Center's friendly Box Office staff at (708) 235-2222 or online at www.centertickets.net.