

Alvin Ailey Ensemble Returns to L.A. Next Week for a 10-Show Run

By Jeff Favre
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Paul Kolnik/Contributed photo
Yannick Lebrun, an Alvin Ailey dancer for the past four seasons, was incredibly moved the first time he saw the Ailey ensemble perform "Revelations." "It's like going to church," he says. "You feel uplifted, as if you've been cleansed."

Since its formation in 1958, New York's Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has played a pivotal role in pushing and transforming the boundaries of modern dance, particularly in the United States.

But as a child Yannick Lebrun of French Guiana didn't know that history. He only knew that when he saw the pieces created by Ailey and his company, those dances — particularly Ailey's famed "Revelations" — expressed what he felt when he danced on stage.

Years of hard work, bolstered by his mother's sacrifices to keep him in training, led to his winning a pair of scholarships to study with the Ailey school for two summers as a teen. He followed that by deciding to leave his home for New York in hopes of landing a permanent spot with the company.

He did. Now in his fourth season, Lebrun will be part of the ensemble when it begins a 10-performance run April 8 at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles. This tour will be the troupe's last under the guidance of artistic director Judith Jamison, who is stepping down after more than 20 years. Her hand-picked replacement, Robert Battle, will take over next season.

Three different programs will be presented in L.A. The one constant in each will be a full-length performance of "Revelations." Prior to performances of "Revelations," a film will be shown that helps explain the inspiration and meaning of what has become one of the most famous 20th century American dances. Ailey, who died in 1989, created the piece in 1960 to celebrate the cultural heritage of African Americans.

Lebrun still recalls his emotions the first time he saw "Revelations" live.

"It was great to see clips of it on video, but when I first experienced it for real I was in awe," Lebrun said. "It's like going to church. You feel uplifted, as if you've been cleansed. It's such a masterpiece."

Another classic Ailey dance that will be performed (as part of the "All Ailey" program) is "Memoria" from 1979. With music by Keith Jarrett, the dance was created to honor choreographer Joyce Trisler, who was 45 when she died.

"It's one of my favorites by Mr. Alvin Ailey," Lebrun said. "It truly celebrates the life and work of Joyce Trisler, and it's so beautiful."

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

The New York ensemble, on its final tour with artistic director Judith Jamison, will perform "Revelations" and other works April 8-17 at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 N. Grand Ave., Los Angeles. Three different programs will be presented; the one constant at each show will be a performance of "Revelations." The "21st Century Ailey" program will be performed at 7:30 p.m. April 8, 14 and 16 and 2 p.m. April 9; "All Ailey" will be presented at 7:30 p.m. April 9 and 15 and 2 p.m. April 10; and "20 Years of Jamison" will be performed at 7:30 p.m. April 13 and 2 p.m. April 16-17. Tickets are \$25-\$105 through Ticketmaster, 800-745-3000 or ticketmaster.com. For more information, visit alvinailey.org.



Paul Kolnik/Contributed photo Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will perform the groundbreaking dance piece "Revelations" at all 10 of its performances next week. The work, introduced in 1960, celebrates the cultural heritage of African Americans.

The Ailey ensemble, as usual, is combining noted works from its repertory with new pieces, including a company premiere of "Anointed," Christopher L. Huggins' first dance for the company, with music by Moby and Sean Clements.

Jamison also will be honored with the inclusion of two of her dances: "Love Stories," set to the music of Stevie Wonder, which she choreographed with Battle and Rennie Harris, and "Forgotten Time," which was inspired by ancient love rituals.

"It's been a privilege to work with Judith Jamison," Lebrun said. "She has not only taught us to dance, but she has helped us to understand what came before us. I think (Battle) will continue to move us forward. He has great ideas and is in touch with cultures around the world. But he also will hold onto the legacy of Mr. Alvin Ailey while we continue to grow and change."

Lebrun said he never takes his place in the company for granted. And every time he is on stage it keeps the fight in him alive.

"My mom worked hard to make a better future for me," he said, "and I continue to work hard and to be dedicated. Mr. Alvin Ailey's work keeps me going."