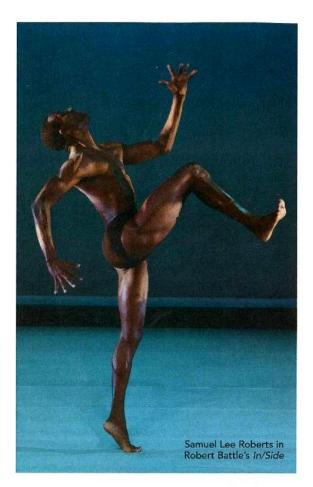


July 2011

## fromtheheart WHY I DANCE



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Samuel
Lee Roberts is a dancer of extremes. This
whirlwind of raw energy was an "On the Rise" in
May 2006 when he was still a Battleworks dancer.
Whether basking in the lushness of the "Wade in
the Water" section of Ailey's Revelations or
moving wildly through the pulsing rhythms of
Geoffrey Holder's otherworldly Prodigal Prince,
he's a standout. But it's his passionate, reckless
performance in Robert Battle's searing solo
In/Side that has captivated audiences.

Roberts grew up in Quakertown, PA, and attended The Juilliard School. In addition to performing with SENSEDANCE, Corbin Dances, and Keigwin + Company, he was a founding member of Battleworks Dance Company. He has explored more commercial ventures, too, dancing at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, the Radio City Christmas Spectacular, and in the Julie Taymor film Across the Universe.

## by Samuel Lee Roberts

I have always found it physically impossible to be still if there is music playing. Doctors today might diagnose me with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and that's fine. Just hold the Ritalin and put me on the stage!

I was about 10 when I attended my first dance class. One afternoon my cousin Janine was preparing to go to her lesson at the nearby studio Dance Works and invited me to come along. I remember arriving at a small building with one studio and a dressing room for girls—there were no boys. The studio was warm and inviting, almost like a living room. Soon enough the teacher, Jen Dancy, who saw me wiggling and fidgeting, invited me to participate—or maybe I just leaped up and joined in. But I will never forget the absolute bliss I felt for the next 45 minutes.

I performed in the recital that year with Janine's class and continued dancing in every recital until I graduated from high school. A family friend urged me to audition for The Juilliard School, and to my great surprise I was accepted. My life was about to change in more ways than I ever could have imagined.

I was unaware of the meticulous refinement, tenacious repetition, and nuance it took to create a beautiful artist—and to cultivate his mind. At the same time, I was meeting the most interesting people from around the world. Not to mention all of the awe-inspiring companies and artists at my fingertips. Two of my favorites: the Ailey company and one of its stars, Desmond Richardson, and New York City Ballet principal Albert Evans. As a young dancer, I wanted to be able to do anything asked of me, regardless of style, and Desmond exemplified this ability. Albert's dancing was extremely beautiful, but I think I was more inspired by the fact that he was the only African American principal dancer in one of the best ballet companies in the world.

In 2000, I received a call from Robert Battle asking me to join his new company, Battleworks (I had performed his solo *Damn* at Juilliard). Mr. Battle took me into his heart and gave me extraordinary opportunity, guidance, trust, and freedom. The thing I love the most about performing his work is the way the drama drives the dance. It is never just steps and shapes.

And then in 2008, we created the solo *In/Side*. A tailor-made solo for me! This was a monumental moment. Dancing *In/Side* is one of the most exhilarating, exhausting, and frightening things I have ever done. I had never had to be so completely vulnerable in such a public space. Not to mention the physical challenge of alternating between throwing myself around and being completely still. Little did I know...Judith Jamison would see me perform and be moved.

So in 2009, during a period when Battleworks' workload was getting lighter due to the economic downturn, some of my friends suggested I look for more stability. I decided to audition for the Ailey company. When Ms. Jamison called my name as one of the three men who would be joining the company, I was flabbergasted. Just like so many times before, dance had taught me never to fear my future, that all is possible.

Now, in my second season with Ailey, I could not be happier. It seems like Kismet. ■