

## Alvin Ailey Begins New Season with 9 New Dancers and New Director

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By Lauren A. White

Last month's opening of Alvin Ailey's five-week New York season was a first for nine new Alvin Ailey dancers and for the company's new artistic director Robert Battle. *Dominion of New York* spoke with two of the new dancers about what we can expect from the show, their appreciation for their new leader and more. Jacqueline Green and Sean A. Carmon are graduates of the Ailey/Fordham Bachelors of Fine Arts Program in Dance. Jacqueline is from Baltimore, Maryland and Sean is from Beaumont, Texas.

**DoNY:** *This is your first year at Alvin Ailey, how's it going?*

**JACQUELINE:** It's going well. It seems like it happened all so quickly. We auditioned for the company and it was a quick crossover, we had two weeks to learn right before the ten week tour during the summer so it was really fast paced. I'm enjoying it.

**SEAN:** Everything is going pretty well so far, just trying to get as much as I can out of the experience and all the performances.

**DoNY:** *The NY season opened on November 30th. What was opening night like?*

**JACQUELINE:** It was great. It was kind of the icing on the cake for me, because although I got into the company earlier in May and I went on tour in the summertime, Opening Night at New York City Center is where everything hit me: I'm actually in Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. City Center is where I first saw Ailey perform, so to be able to head to the theater and be in a show, instead of watching it for the first time, was really emotional. That's a big night for me.

**DoNY:** *Robert Battle became Artistic Director of Alvin Ailey in July. How has it been with him at the helm?*

**SEAN:** I really appreciate how concise he is. There's really no beating around the bush with him. For me, that's been a good thing. Some people aren't really used to that, but that's how I've always worked. We had our mid-term talks and he looked at me and said, "I know that I could ask you to do pirouettes all day long, and you could do it, but you know what I want you to do, I want you to work on the things that don't come easy for you" and I had never had someone tell me that. I've always thought it, but no one usually comes out and says, "This is what I want from an artistic director, I think that's a very direct and poignant thing to work with. He always gives us the choice to be human. We're gonna make mistakes and he does allow that breathing room. He's not a dictator or anything like that. He is very clear and very concise so there is no room for misinterpretation and I really appreciate that about him.

**JACQUELINE:** I really appreciate the direction that he's taking the company with the new choreography. I think the choreographers that he's bringing in have different movements so it's kind of taking the company in a different direction that our audiences haven't seen before. They haven't seen us do certain movements before, like in Paul Taylor's piece, *Arden Court*. It will broaden our vocabulary of movement. I really appreciate that. You'll see our traditional pieces, like *Revelations*, but you'll also see us do different things that you wouldn't expect the company to do.

**DoNY:** *What can people expect from the show?*

**SEAN:** Well you can come with a lot of expectations. You can expect whatever you want to! You're gonna see a lot of beautiful bodies moving on the space on the stage. This is—oh I don't even know how to describe it—this is a dancing company and they, my fellow co-workers and artists, they get on that stage and they twirl. If you are coming to our show,



not only should you expect a wonderful dance performance, I think you should expect a wonderful emotional connection. Most of our pieces have some kind of story behind them.



Sean A. Carmon, 22, is from Beaumont, Texas.

**JACQUELINE:** They should expect traditional pieces and they should also expect new pieces from different choreographers. New dancers, because we have a lot of new dancers in the company. We have nine new dancers this year who were Robert Battle's first pick. So the audience can get used to seeing new faces on stage representing Ailey. I'm excited about that.

**DoNY:** *In this season's show, there are several pieces that are premiering. What can you tell us about them?*

**JACQUELINE:** We're doing a work by Ohad Naharin called *Minus 16*. It's very interesting. I think the audience is going to get a kick out of it, because it has audience participation. We break that fourth wall and we go into the audience and bring them on stage and (laughs) it's going to be funny.

**SEAN:** *Home* (choreographed by Rennie Harris) is a brand new piece, the world premiere, and it's of the hip hop dancing vernacular. It's more so in the house style of dancing. We have a partnership with Bristol-Myers Squibb and they have a campaign called "Fight HIV Your Way" and they invited people to submit stories and poems and essays on how they are living and fighting HIV daily in their lives. I think 1,300 or 1,400 people submitted entries and a panel of people from Ailey chose 10 entries and the choreographer for *Home* read them and he was inspired by them and he started to come up with movements and story lines and images. It's not a direct story, but it is an uplifting, gospel, house music. Preachers in the background and very good beats and things like that. He wanted us to have the sense of a community, a family. It is something that is gonna take you home, wherever that is for you, maybe the club, the church, your actual apartment. I think that piece is meant to transport you back through what we are doing

**JACQUELINE:** I love Mr. Ailey's work. I love all of his work and I'm excited about the new choreographers that have come into the company as well. One of my favorite pieces of his, besides *Revelations*, is *Streams*: this really abstract piece about water and how it moves, either gentle or aggressive. I really enjoy that piece.

**SEAN:** That's a pretty abstract ballet based on the music and the images of water. I would think the audience is going to expect a story, because they will feel something, especially if they see a performance of *Revelations* (there are only about four or five shows this season where we don't end with *Revelations*), but I know from personal experience that you are going to be touched. Some people get different messages out of it. I think the common denominator is that everyone leaves feeling some type of way with some type of message that they've gotten from the dancing.

**DoNY:** *You both keep mentioning Revelations, a returning piece that was choreographed by Alvin Ailey. What's that piece like?*

**JACQUELINE:** *Revelations* is a piece about Mr. Ailey's heritage and growing up in Texas. It's a suite of spirituals relating to the Bible and it's in three sections. It moves me and I think it's one of the pieces that tends to move most of our audiences, because of its emotional effect. There's joy, pain, jubilation, it goes through a number of emotions. It's my favorite piece to perform, yet and still, and it's the most performed piece.

**DoNY:** *Sean, what piece from the show is your favorite to perform?*

**SEAN:** Woo! I most look forward to performing in the "Sinner Man" section in *Revelations*. It's a trio for three men and it's basically three solos and then they come together and dance. It's quite short. I think it's about three minutes long, but every man has about eight eight-counts of music to go out there and do their thing. We come barreling out and we're doing split leaps and jumps and many, many pirouettes and we're sliding across the floor on our knees and that section always gets the loudest applause in *Revelations*, because I think it's just so fantastic to see men being so virtuosic; to see them twirling themselves around, but still having control over what their doing.

We're shirtless and it's very bright lights. And when I say we come barreling out, I mean, we come barreling out. To me, that high energy, that high octane movement is something that can be challenging to me, because I'm very long and lean so moving quickly doesn't come easy for me, so I have to kind of challenge myself every time I go out there. To me, "Sinner Man" is my favorite and least favorite to perform, because it's so challenging.