

December 2016

DANCER TO DANCER  
letter to my teenage self

# Vernard J. GILMORE

**Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Vernard J. Gilmore** is proof that it's never too late to follow your passion. Gilmore didn't start dancing until the age of 17—and now he's one of Ailey's best-known company members. He trained at the Curie Metropolitan High School for Performing and Creative Arts in Chicago and at the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theatre, and attended Barat College on scholarship. Gilmore went on to study at The Ailey School and was a member of Ailey II before joining the main company in 1997. Gilmore is also an accomplished choreographer—he's created pieces for events including the Fire Island Dance Festival and the Jazz Foundation of America Gala. Catch him this month in AAADT's home season at New York City Center. —Courtney Bowers

Dear Vernard,

As you explore this wonderful art form I implore you to do three things: Believe in yourself, be extremely observant and make it your goal to give with kindness every day.

You'll encounter that dreadful thing we call insecurity, and it'll be a challenge. Believe in what you say and do! Have the courage to pick yourself up when you fall. Remember what Ms. Wilson, your sixth-grade teacher, taught you: Quitters never win and winners never quit. Draw on your passion for what you love to do. This will give you strength when doubt creeps in.

Observe everything and everyone around you. Allow yourself to see in high-definition, and try to take in all the details. Hiding in the nuances of life are the gifts that you'll someday be able to bring to the stage. Knowledge is imperative to gaining success and excellence. The more you know, the more you can show. Be vigilant about observing so you're always ready to absorb new ideas. Remember that the only competition you have control over is between you and the "best you" that you're striving to achieve.

Last, but not least by any means, approach life with kindness. Take a moment before reacting. Breathe. Gather all of the information so you're always able to make informed decisions. Give to your teachers as they give to you! Accept defeat with grace, and rely on your courage and strength to always get up and try again. Remember the shoulders you stand on, those who have come before you. Remember your responsibility to this art we call dance. Never let anything steal the joy you have for dance. Dwell in its infinity, and respect its possibilities.

Wishing you all the best!

Love,



At age 18, in Andre Tyson's *Meridians*