

# THE AILEY SCHOOL®

OFFICIAL SCHOOL OF ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER



THE JOAN WEILL CENTER FOR DANCE | 405 WEST 55TH ST (AT 9TH AVE.), NEW YORK, NY 10019

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# OVERVIEW

THE **AILEY** SCHOOL  
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**Students from The Ailey School Professional Division.**  
Photo by Nir Arieli



**The Ailey School First Steps.**  
Photo by Rosalie O'Connor



**The Ailey School Athletic Boys.**  
Photo by Eduardo Patino



**The Ailey School Professional Division students in Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrish's *Scream Scram Scrim*.** Photo by Nan Melville

[CLICK ON PHOTOS FOR HI-RES DOWNLOAD](#)

## HISTORY

Guided by the belief that dance instruction should be made available to everyone, Alvin Ailey founded The Ailey School in 1969. In 1982, The Ailey School and its programs received accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Dance and flourished for almost three decades under the direction of Denise Jefferson until her passing in 2010. Since then, Co-Directors Tracy Inman and Melanie Person have led the prestigious faculty of over 75 dance professionals. The Ailey School offers one of the most extensive dance education programs in the world, which has attracted students from over 93 countries, training approximately 3,500 students and offering over 300 fellowships annually, as well as a pioneering Bachelor of Fine Arts degree program with Fordham University. In 2017, The Ailey School expanded with the opening of the Elaine Wynn and Family Education Wing. With this addition, the building now encompasses 87,000 square feet with 16 rehearsal studios, two classrooms, a 275-seat theater, physical therapy facilities, a library, a costume shop, administrative offices, and more – making the School's home, The Joan Weill Center for Dance, the largest building dedicated to dance in New York City, the world capital of dance.

## MISSION

The Ailey School honors the vision of Alvin Ailey by providing superior professional dance training and artistic leadership. Students of all ages and nationalities come from all over the world to train in our nurturing environment of creativity, passion, and professionalism through an accredited curriculum led by esteemed faculty, staff, and choreographers who produce outstanding dance professionals of tomorrow.

## CURRICULUM

Unique among dance academies, The Ailey School offers an accredited and comprehensive curriculum including ballet, Dunham, Graham-based modern, Horton, jazz, tap and West African dance. The school rounds out its curriculum with classes in barre a terre, body conditioning, yoga, Gyrokinesis®, partnering, repertory, improvisation, dance composition, dance history, music and theater arts, and performance opportunities.

## GRADUATES

The Ailey School's alumni have pursued successful performing arts careers in major dance companies and theater productions including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, Ballett Frankfurt, Ballet Hispanico, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Martha Graham Dance Company, *Hamilton*, *Ain't Too Proud*, *The Lion King*, *The King and I*, *The Color Purple*, *Movin' Out*, and *The Radio City Rockettes*. Other graduates are producers, teachers, choreographers, administrators and life-long supporters of dance. More than 80% of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater members are alumni of the school, with more than a third attending the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program, the finest in dance and liberal arts education.



Photo by Eduardo Patino



## TRACY INMAN CO-DIRECTOR, THE AILEY SCHOOL

Tracy Inman is a native of Washington, D.C. and a graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts where he majored in music. In 1981, he changed his artistic course from music to dance and moved to New York City where he was awarded a scholarship to study at The Ailey School. After completing two years of study, Mr. Inman joined Ailey II and then was invited by Judith Jamison in 1989 to be a part of The Jamison Project and in 1990 a member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater – touring nationally and internationally with the Company for five years and working with choreographers such as Ulysses Dove, Jerome Robbins, Donald Byrd, and Louis Johnson. Mr. Inman danced in the Vienna, Austria and Antwerp, as well as Belgium productions of the musical *Cats*. In 1999, he began teaching the Horton technique at The Ailey School. Mr. Inman was then named Co-Director of the Junior Division in 2001 where, along with Melanie Person, he grew the program from 350 students to its current enrollment of over 900 students. Mr. Inman has served as a judge for Ballet Stars of the 21st Century Dance Competition in Panama City, Panama, The Seoul International Dance Competition in Seoul, South Korea, and Dream on Dance Competition in Verona, Italy. In addition, he conducts auditions for The Ailey School's national audition tour. In 2001, Mr. Inman launched the Ailey Athletic Boys Program providing scholarship training to a diverse group of young males and creating a pipeline into the world of dance for a population that would not have otherwise had the opportunity. He was appointed Associate Director of The Ailey School in 2009 and Co-Director in 2010. Mr. Inman has been instrumental in staging The Ailey School students in annual performances at The Ailey Spring Gala. In conjunction with the 50th Anniversary of the school, he led 100 students in a performance inspired by the “Rocka My Soul” finale of Alvin Ailey’s American masterpiece, *Revelations*. Mr. Inman was previously choreographer and consultant for FX’s hit television show, *Pose*.

Photo by Eduardo Patino



## MELANIE PERSON CO-DIRECTOR, THE AILEY SCHOOL

Melanie Person began her early dance training in Jackson, Mississippi at age 6. Upon moving to Columbia, South Carolina a few years later, she continued her dance training at the Calvert-Brodie School of Dance while performing with the Columbia City Ballet. In the winter of 1976, by recommendation of her teacher Ann Brodie, Ms. Person auditioned for the Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH) Summer Intensive and was offered a full scholarship. Upon completion of that summer program, she became an apprentice to the professional company and, in 1979, became a full member at the age of 16 after graduating from Professional Children's School. For 12 years, Ms. Person performed with DTH, traveling around the world performing a diverse repertoire. She performed choreography by artistic luminaries including George Balanchine, Geoffrey Holder, Agnes de Mille, Glen Tetley, Garth Fagan and Arthur Mitchell, DTH's Founder and Artistic Director. Her television credits include performances in NBC's presentation of DTH's "Creole Giselle," "CBS 60 Minutes with Ed Bradley featuring DTH," the closing ceremonies of the 1984 Olympics and the PBS presentation of "Live at the Kennedy Center The Making of Firebird." She later went on to earn her B.A. from SUNY Empire State College. In 1999, Denise Jefferson invited her to join the PPAS ballet faculty at The Ailey School and in 2000 Ms. Jefferson appointed her as the Co-Director of the Junior Division alongside Tracy Inman. Shortly thereafter, Ms. Person was made Chair of the ballet department and President of the Emergency Fund for Student Dancers. Ms. Person has been on the faculty of the Dance Theatre of Harlem School, the Ballet Hispánico School, Marymount Manhattan College, Purchase College and a teaching artist in the New York City Public School System. She is a member of the Council of Dance Administrators and the Board of Directors for the National Association of Schools of Dance. Additionally, she has guest taught at The Flint Institute of Music, Dance Institute of Washington, Boston Ballet School and The Adaclam School in French Guyana. Ms. Person has served as an adjudicator for the Youth American Grand Prix and Japan Grand Prix. In 2009, she was named Associate Director of The Ailey School and in 2010, Co-Director with Tracy Inman after Ms. Jefferson's passing. For over a decade, Ms. Person has been a supervisor of the New Directions Choreography Lab working with Ailey's Artistic Director Robert Battle to provide opportunities for the next generation of choreographers and dance artists.



# JUNIOR DIVISION PROGRAMS

THE **AILEY** SCHOOL  
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The Ailey School offers a diversified approach to dance training for students ages 3-17 in two divisions:

- The First Steps & Bounding Boys Program - ages 3-6
- The Pre-Professional Program - ages 7-17
  - Ailey Athletic Boys Dance - ages 7-10
  - Summer Intensive Program - ages 11-15
  - Pre-Professional Scholarship Program - ages 15-17

## FIRST STEPS AND BOUNDING BOYS

In this program, 3-year-old boys and girls, and 4 to 6-year-old girls develop their mind and muscle memory through a weekly series of fun exercises that lay the groundwork for proper dance technique. They develop body awareness and control while exploring their own creativity and develop an understanding of the connection between dance, rhythm and music. Children are encouraged to think creatively and listen attentively while they develop rhythmic awareness and learn the healthy habit of exercising at an early age. An extension of the First Steps program, Bounding Boys offers a creative, athletic experience for young boys, ages 4-6, to develop dance skills and coordination through music, movement and tumbling techniques.

## AILEY ATHLETIC BOYS DANCE PROGRAM

The Ailey Athletic Boys Dance Program is a scholarship track within the Pre-Professional Program of the Junior Division for boys between the ages of 7-18 who exhibit a strong interest in dance. A primary goal of the program is to provide access to conservatory caliber training that will enable students to matriculate to the highest levels within Junior Division. Classes are structured to develop strength, flexibility and coordination along with the discipline, focus and drive found in professional male athletes and dancers. Boys participate in a variety of classes each Saturday, including Ballet, Horton (a modern dance technique), West African, and Tap. Prior dance training is not required.

## PRE-PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM

The Pre-Professional Program offers a diverse curriculum-based program for students ages 7 to 17 taught by The Ailey School's experienced and distinguished faculty. Designed to develop well-rounded young dancers, the Program offers a graded curriculum of classical ballet, enriched by several other dance techniques including modern, West African, Spanish, tap and character. Performance opportunities are offered in The Ailey Citigroup Theater and a larger NYC Theater in May.

## SUMMER INTENSIVE PROGRAM

The Junior Division Summer Intensive is a two-week intensive training program for students ages 14-16. The Ailey School's Summer Intensive offers young dancers an opportunity to train in a vibrant professional environment centered in the heart of New York City's Theater District. Motivated students with at least three years of consistent training receive first class dance training among a student body of versatile dancers who strive for excellence. Students who reside in NY, NJ, CT, MA, PA, and VT are eligible to apply.

## PRE-PROFESSIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Scholarship Program is a training program for high school students ages 15 to 17 who show the highest potential for a career in dance. This prestigious program provides financial assistance to gifted intermediate and advanced level high school students who attend part-time during the school year and full-time during the summer. Scholarship students also have the opportunity to gain a variety of administrative skills by working in The Ailey School or Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation offices in exchange for their scholarships. Acceptance to the Scholarship Program is by audition.

# PROFESSIONAL DIVISION PROGRAMS

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The Professional Division offers post-secondary, full-time programs that take a conservatory approach to dance training for ages 17-25.

## AILEY/FORDHAM B.F.A. PROGRAM

An innovative partnership between The Ailey School and Fordham University, the Ailey/Fordham Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree combines the finest in dance and liberal arts education in a 4-year program. Students complete a diverse curriculum while attending both institutions full time. Located in the cultural heart of New York City, the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program offers the best of both worlds: professional dance training at the official school of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and an exceptional liberal arts education rooted in the Jesuit tradition of intellectual development and personal attention. The program offers a comprehensive study of several dance techniques, preparing graduates for a variety of jobs in today's diverse dance profession. Our focus on dance technique and performance offers students the opportunity to hone their professional skills and prepare for life as a professional dancer.

## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Ailey School's prestigious Scholarship Program offers financially supported full-time training for students ages 17-21 who show the highest potential for a professional dance career. The core curriculum consists of daily classes in ballet, which may include additional classes in Pointe for intermediate/advanced students. Horton and/or Graham-based Modern are taken 5-6 times per week. Supplemental classes include Taylor-based Modern, jazz, tap, Dunham, West African, barre à terre, yoga, Gyrokinesis®, and body conditioning. Improvisation and comp are also offered. Scholarship students also have the opportunity to audition for repertory workshops with guest artists which showcase the talents of the most advanced students. Workshops culminate in studio showings and performances in the Ailey Citigroup Theater at the end of each term.

## CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

The Certificate Program is a three-year program for advanced/beginner to intermediate level students ages 17-23 who have completed their secondary school requirements. This program takes a conservatory approach to dance training, combining technique, dance academics, creative studies, and repertory and performance. The weekly schedule includes 15 to 17 dance technique and somatic classes. Core curriculum consists of daily classes in ballet which may include classes in Pointe for intermediate/advanced students. Horton and/or Graham-based Modern are taken 5-6 times per week. Supplemental and elective classes include; Taylor-based Modern, jazz, tap, Dunham, West African, barre à terre, yoga, Gyrokinesis®, and body conditioning. Creative courses and dance academics such as improvisation, dance composition, dance history, music, and theater arts are also required.

## INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAM

For students between the ages of 17 and 25 who have completed their secondary school requirements, the one-year Independent Study Program offers intensive training for those who wish to further develop their artistry and technical skills in order to enhance their professional potential. The program may also assist those who wish to gain admission to other advanced dance programs. Students must attempt a minimum of 14 classes weekly and successfully pass 952 clock-hours of dance technique and somatic classes weekly from the core curriculum, including daily ballet classes and Horton and/or Graham-based Modern five times per week. Elective technique classes include Taylor-based modern, jazz, tap, Dunham, West African, barre à terre, yoga, Gyrokinesis®, and body conditioning.

## SUMMER INTENSIVE PROGRAM

The Ailey School's Summer Intensive offers intermediate to advanced dancers an opportunity to train in a vibrant professional environment centered in the heart of New York City's Theater District. Motivated students ages 17 to 25 with at least three years of consistent training receive first class dance training among a student body of versatile dancers who strive for excellence.

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# PUBLICITY HIGHLIGHTS



# Best of Both Worlds

Unsure of whether to pursue a college dance degree or a postgraduate training program? BY JESSICA GILES

For years, young dancers fresh out of high school who wanted to continue their training were faced with a choice: Join a trainee program or enroll as a dance major at a four-year university. Nowadays, the options are vast, ranging from one-year postgraduate training programs and second company positions to unique partnerships between lauded dance academies and colleges. As attitudes around dancers going to college have shifted, aspiring professionals now have a host of paths to choose from.

## What Are My Options?

**Postgraduate training program:** This can range from a multiyear company traineeship to a one-year independent study at a renowned dance school. Since these opportunities come

in nearly every shape and size, dancers will need to do some research to find one that fits their goals.

• **Who is it for?** The postsecondary dancer who is searching for more technical training, performance opportunities and emotional growth before embarking on a professional career (but isn't looking for a college degree just yet). These can serve as the ideal transition from student to professional, says Margaret Tracey, director of Boston Ballet School.

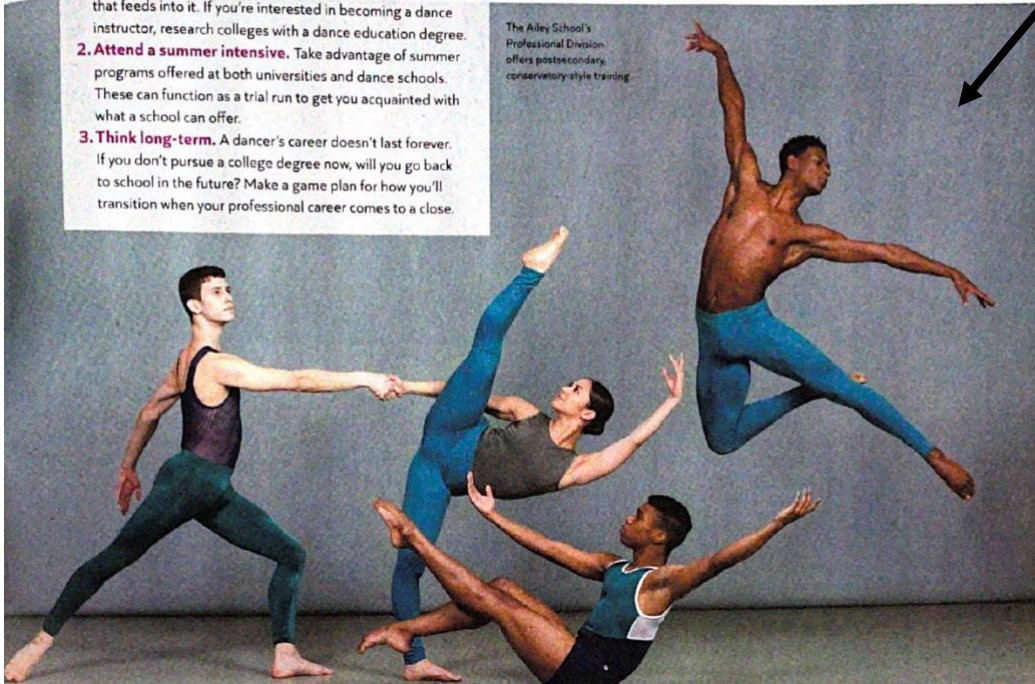
**Four-year university dance program:** Whether you'd like a liberal arts education or the resources of an esteemed research university, a college program allows you to earn your bachelor's degree while specializing in anything from commercial dance to pedagogy.

• **Who is it for?** Dancers who have academic interests they'd like to nurture while continuing their dance training. This can be an excellent option for students who need a little more time

## I'm Torn. How Do I Pick?

1. **Write down your goals.** Having a clear idea of your professional aspirations will help you home in on an opportunity that can get you there. If you have your heart set on a particular company, look into a trainee program that feeds into it. If you're interested in becoming a dance instructor, research colleges with a dance education degree.
2. **Attend a summer intensive.** Take advantage of summer programs offered at both universities and dance schools. These can function as a trial run to get you acquainted with what a school can offer.
3. **Think long-term.** A dancer's career doesn't last forever. If you don't pursue a college degree now, will you go back to school in the future? Make a game plan for how you'll transition when your professional career comes to a close.

The Ailey School's Professional Division offers postsecondary, conservatory-style training.



to decide if they want to go professional, as well as those who want to explore dance with a more academic approach.

**Joint BFA program:** Collaborations between ballet companies or dance schools and universities have cropped up all over the country. From the partnership between Richmond Ballet and Virginia Commonwealth University to the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program, these options blend rigorous training with the chance to earn a college degree and build connections at a company.

• **Who is it for?** The disciplined student who is capable of undertaking the highest caliber of dance training and the rigors of a college academic schedule. "In some ways I think the students who apply to this program must be motivated in more than one way," says Melanie Person, director of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program. "They don't have a myopic view of life."

## Check Your Readiness

Even if you already know you'd like to pursue a career in dance and you feel your technique is up to snuff, don't forget to take stock of your emotional maturity before hitting the job market. "Too much too soon can be very challenging emotionally on a young dancer," Tracey says. "It is almost never a problem to wait a little bit longer." College and training programs designed for pre-professional students can help prepare you, body and mind. ■

**NYC-ARTS Profile: Spirit of Ailey**

October 1, 2020



Watch here: <https://www.nyc-arts.org/showclips/151111/nyc-arts-full-episode-october-1-2020-sspdmt> (Ailey mention @ 0:01-12:22)

**A celebration of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and its educational mission, featuring dancer Solomon Dumas.** Followed by a profile of artist Jeffrey Gibson, whose beadwork, ceramics, sculptures and paintings are inspired by his complex cultural heritage, as well as by minimalism and abstraction. Then NYC-ARTS visits the American Folk Art Museum for a look at the work of Ammi Phillips.



# ELLE

## The Ailey School's Tribute to Judy Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' Will Move You Into the Weekend

By: Nerisha Penrose

March 6, 2020



Watch here: <https://www.elle.com/culture/art-design/a31262362/alvin-ailey-judy-chicago-the-dinner-party-video/> (1 minute)

When Judy Chicago debuted her now-iconic feminist art installation *The Dinner Party* 40 years ago, everyone had thoughts—it was striking and powerful piece to some, and controversial to others. Featuring a large triangular table with 39 dinner plate settings, the piece served as a tribute to women Chicago believed deserved a seat at the table and quickly became her most recognized and praised body of work. In honor of International Women's Day and the 40th anniversary of *The Dinner Party*, Chicago joined forces with The Ailey School to honor the 39 pioneering figures through another art form: dance.

"History is made by heroes" opens the video of the collaboration premiering today, March 6, exclusively on ELLE.com. Co-directed by Redha Medjellekh and Katya Martín from the production company, Red is Dancing, 39 dancers line the triangular table as they perform an interpretive dance routine choreographed by Jessica Castro that gave *The Dinner Party* a new meaning.

"I am thrilled and honored that the Alvin Ailey dancers chose to create a piece in relation to *The Dinner Party*, my symbolic history of women in Western Civilization, now permanently housed at the Brooklyn Museum," Chicago tells ELLE.com. "As I watched the women sway in rhythm around the table it was if the centuries of women represented were rising up to insist on freedom and equity for everyone on the planet. What a wonderful way to remind us that women's rights are human rights."

Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* is currently on display at The Brooklyn Museum.



# The New York Times

## A Dance Class Just For Boys

By: Gia Kourlas  
January 26, 2020



Dancers in the Ailey Athletic Boys Dance Program during a recent jazz class. There are currently about 65 boys enrolled.

# A DANCE CLASS JUST FOR BOYS

BALLET. JAZZ. WEST AFRICAN. THEY DO IT ALL.

BY GIA KOURLAS • PHOTOGRAPH BY Yael Malka

**D**ahsir Hausif began dancing the way a lot of young boys do: “My mom just dragged me to an audition one day,” he says, “and I was like, O.K., I guess I’m doing this now.”

He was 6. At the time, he says, surfing was his main love. But that audition at the Ailey School in New York, from which the most talented of students go on to join the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and other famous dance companies, changed his life. What immediately pulled him in was its dedicated boys’ program. That meant that he wouldn’t be the only boy in a classroom full of girls, which is still often the case in dance training across the country. Now Dahsir, who is 17, has his heart set on pursuing a career in dance. “The artistic part fulfills my personality and the things in my life that I need to express,” he says. And the program, he adds, is “pretty special — you can build that brotherhood.”

Dance might still be seen as a career for girls, but that is changing as boys learn how athletic and fun it is. Training doesn’t necessarily mean that a student will become a professional, but it does give a boy — or girl — the kind of discipline

that carries over into other parts of life. And there are other pluses: You make friends. You push yourself physically. You get to feel more comfortable in your body. “In ballet, we’re doing what our teacher calls ballet gym,” says Finnegan Mack, 11. “That’s where we have to get our muscles ready to do bigger things.”

The Ailey Athletic Boys Dance Program, which began in 2001, offers free classes to boys between the ages of 7 and 18. Until around age 12, their classes feature only other boys; after that, they’re mixed in with the girls. Even though the foundation of the program is ballet, it focuses on creating well-rounded dancers: West African, modern dance and tap are also part of the curriculum. “It’s cool to know what you can or can’t do,” Finnegan says, “and then learn how to do it.”

Mikah Urbano, 11, agrees. Ballet, he says, is about controlling the body; with jazz or West African dance, you can be more free. And he has learned something deeper, beyond the mastery of technique: that dancing is like reading a book. “When you’re using your imagination, you can feel how the characters feel, right?” he says. “When you’re watching someone dance, you can really feel how they feel.” ♦

**‘It’s pretty special — you can build that brotherhood.’**

Dahsir Hausif, 17



## Letter to My First-Year Self

By: Maggie McNamara Mandal

Fall 2019 Issue

# LETTER TO MY First-Year SELF

Five senior dance majors reflect on their college experiences.

By Maggie McNamara Mandal

**After all the work** that goes into applying to college BFA programs, it can seem like getting that long-awaited acceptance letter is the be-all and end-all. But talk to most seniors, and they'll tell you that acceptance is just the beginning of a whirlwind experience. We asked five senior dance majors from some of the nation's top programs to look back on their college journeys and offer advice to their freshman selves.



**Meagan King**  
The Alley School and  
Furham University

Dear Freshman Meagan,

You're entering your dream school as a bright-eyed young woman on cloud nine, hungry to continue learning. That joy and light in your heart will never dim. The self-empowerment you'll feel from pursuing an arts career is phenomenal because you're one of the few brave ones.

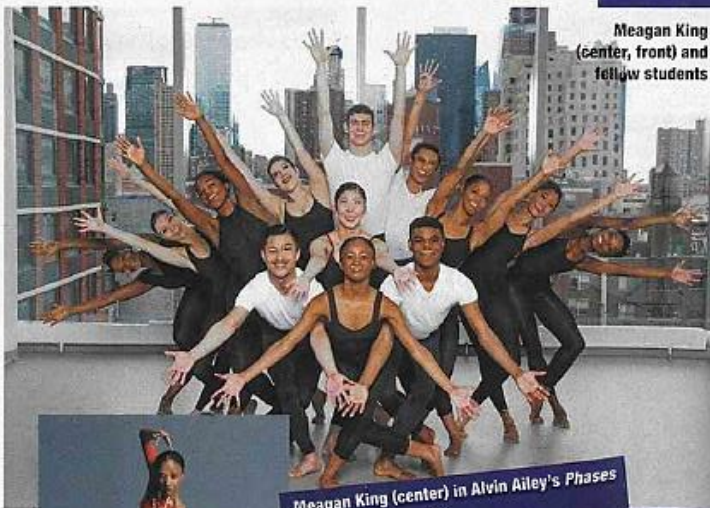
You're nervous, but the nerves are there because you care. Acknowledge them, but never let them cripple you. Channel them into strength. Remember three simple words: I am able. Only you can grant yourself permission to step into your greatness.

Every high, low, loop, and sharp turn on this college roller coaster will give you a piece to help you build the person you'll become. Each day you enter the studio, remind yourself of the "Why" that drew you in, and your passion will carry you.

This program can be quite intense. Self-care is important. Don't choose extra studying over an hour of needed sleep. You're only your best self when you take care of yourself. Allot time for rejuvenation: a walk in the park, meeting good friends, or, best of all, sleep! You are a person first, before you are a dancer.

We've come so far, Meagan. Awaiting graduation, I'm thrilled to see where life will take us. You're going to soar freely and write your story in the sky. You are light. Shine on, little queen. You are doing just fine. You will be amazed at God's blessings to come.

Meagan King



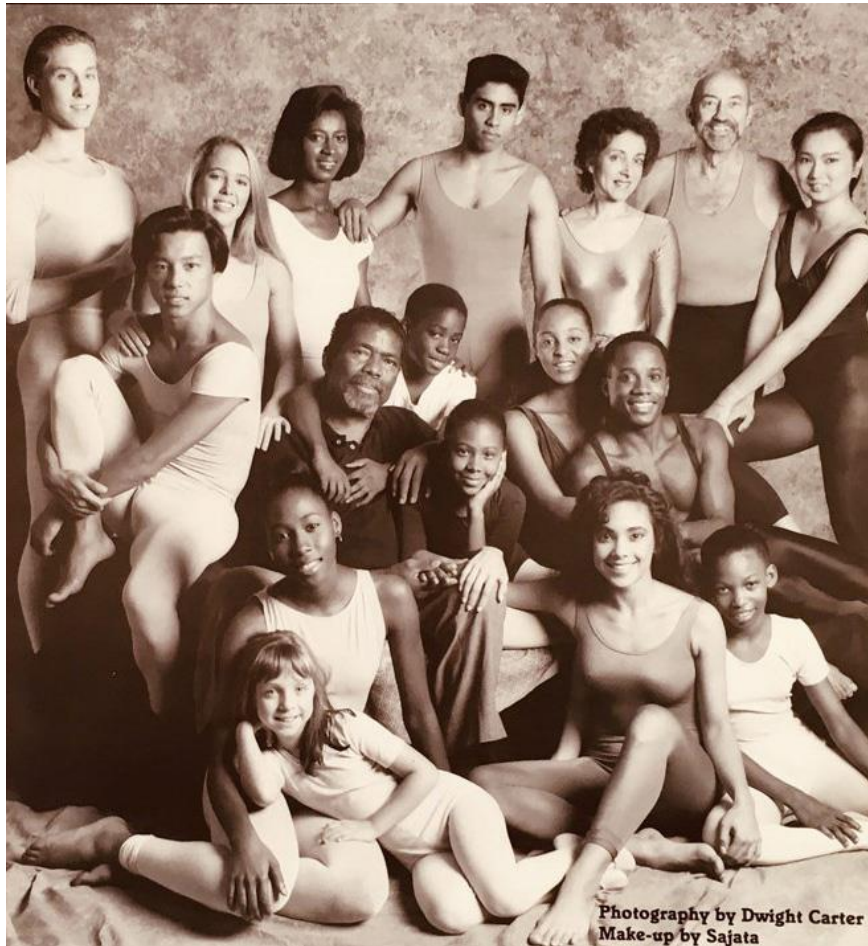
**Meagan King**  
(center, front) and  
fellow students



**Meagan King (center) in Alvin Ailey's Phases**



THIS PAGE: FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: MEAGAN KING; ALVIN AILEY; COURTESY THE AILEY SCHOOL



Courtesy of Ailey Archives

Photography by Dwight Carter  
Make-up by Sajata

## FIFTY YEARS OF DEVELOPING DREAMS AT THE AILEY SCHOOL

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By Jen Peters

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Alvin Ailey in 1989 with students from The Ailey School, including Tracy Inman who is now the Co-Director of The Ailey School

In 1979, a young New York City boy met Alvin Ailey at his public elementary school during a dance workshop; unbeknownst to him it was an audition. Then nine-year-old Troy Powell had no idea who Mr. Ailey was and no formal dance training, although he came from a large African American family where dance was interwoven into their everyday home life. "I was handpicked to join the first children's program at The Ailey School, and the experience made a huge impact and changed my life," says Powell, who continued to climb the ranks through the School's professional division, Ailey II, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. He succeeded Sylvia Waters in 2012 as Ailey II's Artistic Director.

To launch a celebration of 50 years of training excellence at the School, Powell is creating a pièce d'occasion for the June 13th Ailey Spirit Gala at Lincoln Center inspired by this journey and





Above, Alvin Ailey and Carmen de Lavallade, below, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*

spotlighting all the different programs. Another of the special programs during the engagement honors the iconic artistry of Carmen de Lavallade, who attended high school with Mr. Ailey in Los Angeles and introduced him to his first dance class.

Now led by co-directors Tracy Inman and Melanie Person, The Ailey School's model of versatile dance training rooted in Horton technique, Graham-based modern, and ballet speaks for itself. The majority of Ailey company dancers trained at the School, and Ailey students grace stages with major dance companies, Broadway shows, The Rockettes, and appear in films and television programs. Notably, former Ailey II dancer and The Ailey School/Fordham University BFA graduate Ephraim Sykes received a 2019 Tony

nomination for his role in the new musical *Ain't Too Proud*. Ailey students have also excelled through innovative choreographic careers, including Ailey/Fordham BFA graduate Maya Taylor, whose work was recently featured in Solange's music video *Almeda*, in the Netflix series *Dirt*, and the TNT show *Claws*. "Training at Ailey influenced how hard I work on everything I create, whether it's a simple 8-counts for a TV show or a full-length ballet—I learned not just about doing the step, but about developing my artistry."



Photo © Paul Kolnik

## A Creative Home

As Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's 60th anniversary season comes to a close, this summer's Lincoln Center programming highlights lives impacted by the Ailey legacy, a testament to the power of Mr. Ailey's mission to give dance back to the people. He founded the School in Brooklyn in 1969, making professional dance training accessible to all students. The School thrived because of the community of people, the inspiring teachers dedicated to dance. However, up until 2005 they did not have a permanent home.

"We moved every ten years, from the East side in the 50's, down to 44th and Broadway, and up to the more intimate studios of 61st street on the West side," reminisces Ana Marie Forsythe, The Ailey School Chair of the Horton department. "I know that Alvin dreamed about owning a building, having the right space for dance—Judith Jamison really made that building happen and knew what he wanted." The 87,000-square foot Joan Weill Center for Dance is now the largest building dedicated to dance in New York City—the dance capital of the world—with 16 studios, a 275-seat theater, and an estimated 200,000 people dancing their way through the building each year.

Versatile artist Darrell Grand Moultrie, who has choreographed for superstars like Beyoncé and ballet companies domestically and internationally, describes The Ailey School as his creative home. "Denise Jefferson first brought me in, she made Ailey

Clockwise from left, The Joan Weill Center for Dance with the Elaine Wynn & Family Education Wing, North view; The Ailey School's Horton Class taught by Ana Marie Forsythe; Entrance to The Joan Weill Center for Dance



Images © Frederick Charles, fcharles.com



Photo © Kyle Froman





Above, Ailey II in Darrell Grand Moultrie's *Road to One*, below, Moultrie at Lincoln Center

home for me—it's my base of support, they trust my process and allow me to be creative," says Moultrie. He says the dancers at Ailey have vitality and are "laced with fire;" they are always ready for a challenge.

### A Personal Homage

Moultrie is bringing a world premiere to the Ailey stage centered on the essence of gratitude, not just for Ailey but for his third grade NYC public school teacher who introduced him

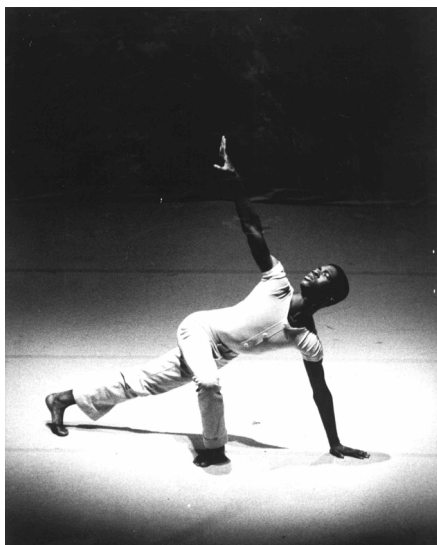
to the Ailey company, along with Dance Theatre of Harlem and New York City Ballet. "Seeing *Revelations* and *Night Creature* really changed me! I went home and started making up dances with kids in my neighborhood," Moultrie recalls. "It showed me I could be more than just one thing as a black man."

His debut creation for the first company (he's choreographed 3 works for Ailey II and over 14 works for Ailey School students) premieres on opening night, Wednesday, June 12, and features original music. "I am grateful for what Mr. Ailey started; to have a premiere at Lincoln Center is a full circle moment for me as a New Yorker," says Moultrie. "I am living proof of the effects of arts in education."



Photo © Mark Stanley





Above, Troy Powell in Ailey II performing Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* in 1989

continued from page 12

Reflecting on his own personal journey, Powell choreographed a ballet that follows five male dancers—from Ailey's junior division, Ailey Camp, professional division, Ailey II, and Solomon Dumas from Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater—through an abstracted, transformational narrative. Dumas's own story mirrors Powell's, as he was introduced to dance through Ailey Camp and followed the path into the first company in 2016. "I think Mr. Ailey instilled in his students a profound work ethic, a hunger and passion for the art form," Powell describes. "This work for me is passing on his legacy through my journey."

*Jen Peters is a graduate of The Ailey School/ Fordham University BFA program, under the direction of Denise Jefferson and Ana Marie Forsythe. She danced professionally with Jennifer Muller/The Works and is a writer for Dance Magazine and Dance Teacher. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Dance at University of Michigan.*

Below, AAADT's Jacqueline Green and Solomon Dumas in Ronald K. Brown's *The Call*



Photo © Paul Kolnik

## The Alvin Ailey School: 50 years and still going strong

By: Zita Allen

May 30, 2019 – June 5, 2019

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

# The Alvin Ailey School: 50 years and still going strong

By ZITA ALLEN

Special to the AmNews

On Thursday, June 13, the centerpiece of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Lincoln Center engagement will be The Ailey Spirit gala, which launches the 50th anniversary celebration of The Ailey School. The evening's honorary chair is award-winning actress Lorraine Toussaint, star in NBC's "The Village," Netflix's "She-Ra and the Princesses of Power," AMC's "Into the Badlands," and the recently released supernatural thriller "Fast Color" and also the proud parent of a student at The Ailey School.

Lighting up the gala will be a one-night-only performance that is bound to bring down the house as it brings together former AileyCampers from New York and Newark, talented students from The Ailey School, rising stars of Ailey II, and the incomparable members of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. All come together to pay tribute to the school's impact in a work choreographed by Ailey



The Ailey School Co-Director Tracy Inman with students from the Professional Division II Artistic Director Troy Powell.

The piece d'occasion follows the story of a young boy from an Arts In Education program to the Company, which parallels the inspiring journeys of Powell—who was discovered by Mr. Ailey at an outreach activity at age 9 and awarded a scholarship to The Ailey School, before dancing with both companies and later leading the junior company—and Ailey dancer Solomon Dumas, who was introduced to dance at AileyCamp Chicago and has participated in all parts of the organization. The program's Revelations

finale will be followed by a festive soirée that takes place on the promenade with dancing to the spinning of DJ M.O.S.

This 50th Anniversary Celebration kick-off includes a number of highlights and special activities led by Co-Directors Tracey Inman and Melanie Person.

Inman could barely contain his excitement about the upcoming celebration when, during a recent interview, he said, "The fact that we're still here and thriving really demonstrates the importance of the training that Mr. Ailey believed, training that doesn't pigeon-hole the artist as a ballet dancer or a modern dancer but trains them to be a dancer and one who believes that dance comes from the people and must be given back to the people."

Inman himself is a product of the Ailey School. "I came to the Ailey School in the early 1980s from Washington, D.C. The thing that stood out to me when I got here was all these phenomenal, well-

trained, finely tuned dancers' bodies. I was 21 and felt so blessed to be in that space with such talented, disciplined and driven artists.

"I studied Horton, Graham, ballet, West African, Dunham, basically the same thing we're doing now. We're also really engaged with contemporary dance and improvisation and other skills that provide dancers with key tools they need nowadays. But, I think the core curriculum then is the same as it is now. Mr. Ailey liked dancers with a ballet bottom and a modern top that had that fluidity in their torso and those really sharp and clean leg lines that a ballet dancer can achieve."

Inman also pointed to the tremendous outlets for dancers as their technical proficiency and artistry progress. "I was also in Ailey II at one point when Mr. Ailey came in and rehearsed with us and watched us work on 'Blues Suite.' It had a tremendous impact on us to be in the same space as this legend. Sometimes he'd even invite us students into the studio to watch the AAADT company rehearse. It was amazing to see him working with those dancers. It helped feed our desire to really do well, work hard and gave us something to look forward to." Now, Inman says, similar opportunities continue to give young students at The Ailey School a sense of the path they have chosen to follow.

See AILEY on page 22



# Ailey

*Continued from page 17*

Now that he is co-director of the school, Inman says he finds himself modeling the way he interacts with Ailey students after what he saw Mr. Ailey do. "In terms of interactions being open and really understanding the students and their needs and the difficulty in what we're asking them to do, being in New York and the sensitivity to the human spirit, all contributes to the longevity to not only the institution but to what we stand for."

The organization has truly grown. "The school of course has grown tremendously. We now have the space to accommodate a larger student body. We have 89 programs. The international student body has grown over the years. And, we have Ailey Athletic Boys and the Professional Division, the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program, the Certificate program, scholarships. All of those programs have grown exponentially and I think we can attribute that to really understanding the value of what The Ailey School offers, as well as the depth of Mr. Ailey's vision.

"It's amazing when you think about the vision Alvin Ailey had for a school to train dancers for his company because at the time, none of the modern dance companies had a program with the depth and breadth of what he envisioned 50 years ago and which has materialized thanks to the brilliance of Artistic Director Emerita Judith Jamison, former school head, the late Denise Jefferson and the current Co-Directors Melanie Person and Tracey Inman."

Noting just how far ahead of his times Ailey was, Inman notes, "I think this current focus on diversity and the need to be inclusive is something Mr. Ailey was doing way back when. He has always been inclusive and has always thought of diversity and of the need to give women a platform to choreograph as well as to be movers and shakers in administrative and other capacities."

"All you have to do is look at the former Ailey School alumni remaining close to home and setting new works on students, or those who have forged successful careers around the globe in education, concert and commercial dance, Broadway, film and television. Not only was Inman, himself, a member of Ailey II and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, he currently serves as a consultant and choreographer for the TV show 'Pose' on FX, but other alumni working on exciting projects include Ailey/Fordham BFA graduate Marija Abney, who recently appeared in the Academy Award-winning film 'Black Panther,' and former Ailey II dancer and Ailey/Fordham University BFA graduate Ephraim Sykes who has received a 2019 Tony nomination for his role in the new musical 'Ain't Too Proud,' and Beyoncé's dance captain is a one of our former students, and 70 percent of the AAADT comes from The Ailey School," Inman adds. "It's amazing how this training really prepares you for anything and I think that, for me, is what I found to be unique about this. As long as you take the training by the reigns and make it work. Yeah. It prepares you to be a triple or quadruple threat."

## Summer Study Guide 2019: Progression Over Perfection

By: Suzannah Friscia

January 2019 Issue

SUMMER  
STUDY  
GUIDE 2019



In theater dance class, students use choreography to tell a story.

# Progression Over Perfection

A day at The Ailey School's summer intensive **BY SUZANNAH FRISCIA**

On a summer afternoon at The Ailey School's studios, a group of students go through a sequence of Horton exercises, radiating concentration and strength as they tilt to one side, arms outstretched and leg parallel to the ground. Later, in a studio down the hall, a theater dance class rehearses a lively medley of Broadway show tunes. With giant smiles and bouncy energy, students run through steps to "The Nicest Kids in Town" from *Hairspray*. "You gotta really scream!" teacher Judine Somerville calls out as they mime their excitement. "This is live theater!" They segue into the audition number from *A Chorus Line*, "I Hope I Get It," their expressions becoming purposeful and slightly nervous. "Center stage is wherever I am," Somerville tells them when the music stops, making them repeat the words back to her. "Take that wherever you go."

This bustling, ever-moving environment is The Ailey School's summer intensive, which for six weeks each year invites dancers to train

in the Ailey curriculum. Students take up to 15 classes a week: ballet, Horton, Graham and an elective, which might be hip hop, theater dance, West African or contemporary. This summer, the school plans to offer five levels of ballet and four of Horton and Graham, each with a specific syllabus.

Students can also choose to audition for repertory workshops with professional choreographers, which in 2018 included Amy Hall, *Lion King* dancer Ray Mercer and Ailey/Fordham BFA grad Levi Marsman. These dancers get a chance to put their training in context in an original work. "It's about the choreographer going in there and providing another level of teaching," co-director Tracy Inman says. "The dancer understands in a different way: 'Oh, I'm using my Horton technique now.' That's what their job is going to be when they get out in the real world." ►

Rachel Papo (4)





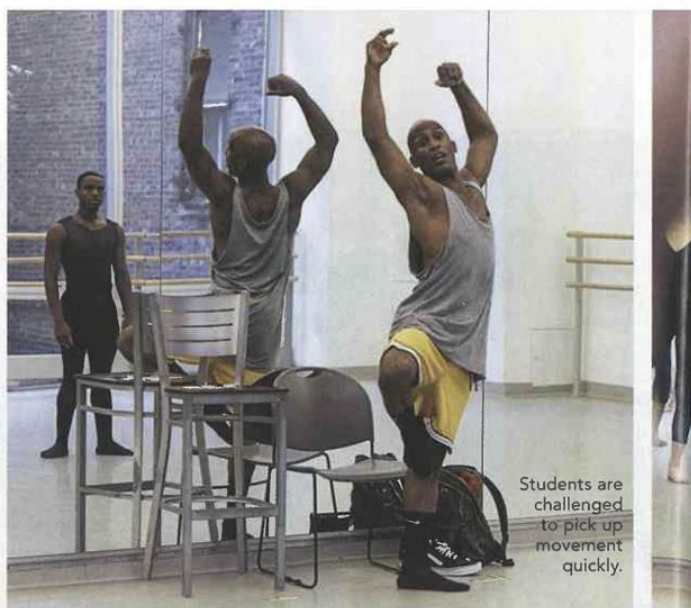
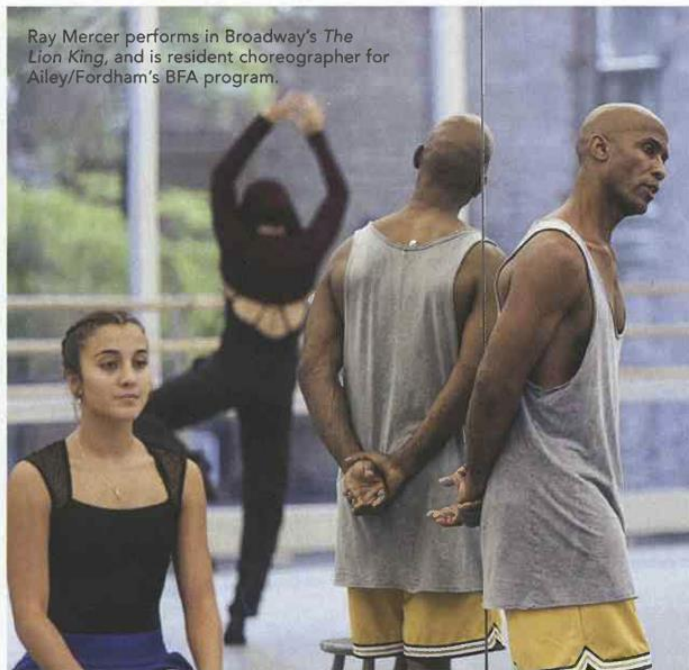
Judine Somerville teaches students to let go of inhibitions onstage.





# SUMMER STUDY GUIDE 2019

Ray Mercer performs in Broadway's *The Lion King*, and is resident choreographer for Ailey/Fordham's BFA program.



Students are challenged to pick up movement quickly.

In a late-afternoon rehearsal of Ray Mercer's repertory workshop, six dancers work on a tricky partnering sequence. As Mercer calls out counts, the women practice a running leap into the arms of their partners. When the men catch them, they tilt their heads back until they're hanging completely upside down. All of this happens in about three seconds. "The movement is very fast; it's also very physical," Mercer says. "I always tell them at the very beginning of the process, I don't want them to move like students. I want them to look like a company of dancers that have been dancing together for a very long time."

Mercer urges dancers to perform not like students, but company members.

## THE DETAILS

Attendance: 225 last summer

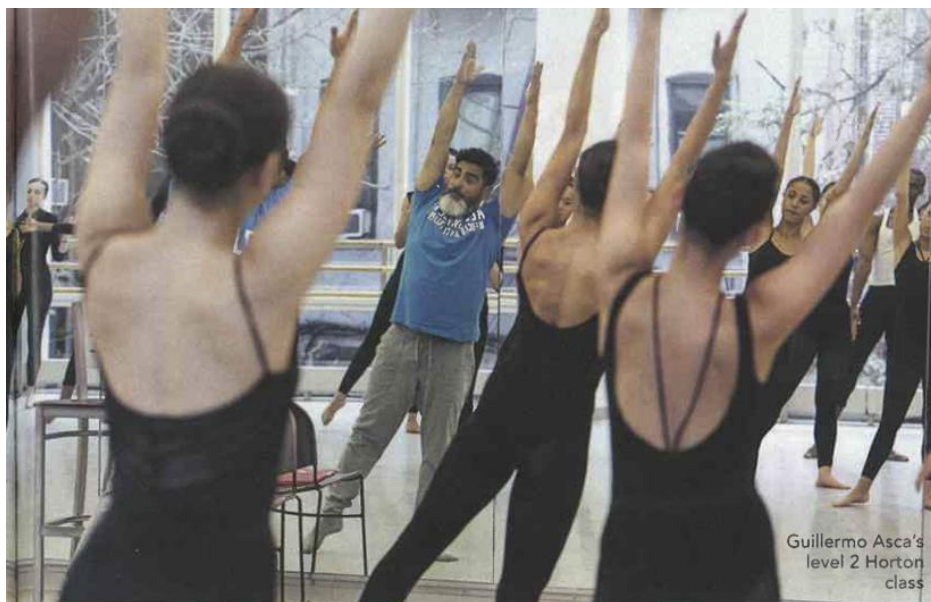
Auditions: U.S. audition tour, video submissions and an annual audition/workshop in Italy

Timeline: Six weeks  
Class sizes: 20-45 students

Ages: 16-25 in the professional division; 11-15 in the junior division

Housing: Dorm lodging available nearby for students 15 and up  
[theaileyschool.edu/programs/summer-intensive](http://theaileyschool.edu/programs/summer-intensive)



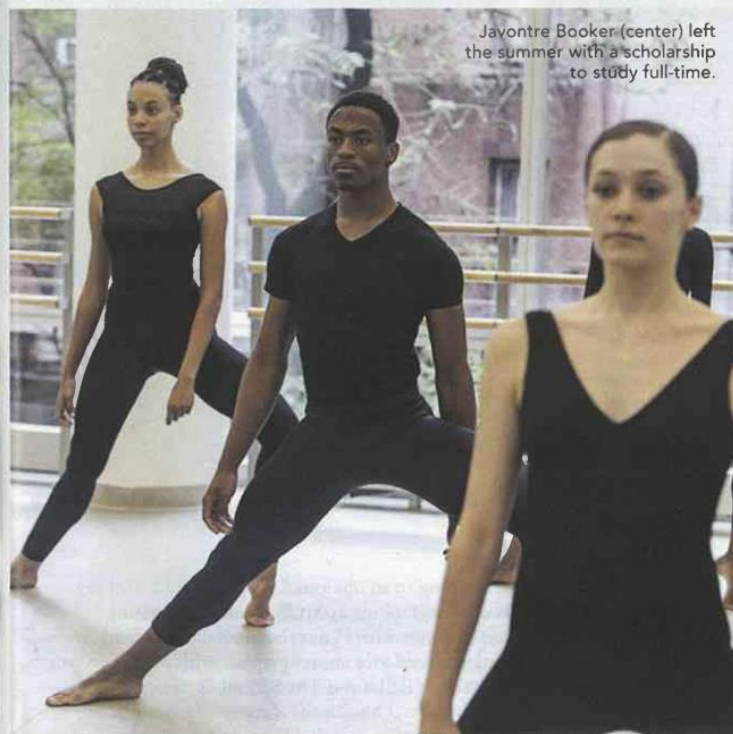


Guillermo Asca's  
level 2 Horton  
class

Asca encourages students to bring dynamism to their movement—even in class.



Javontre Booker (center) left the summer with a scholarship to study full-time.

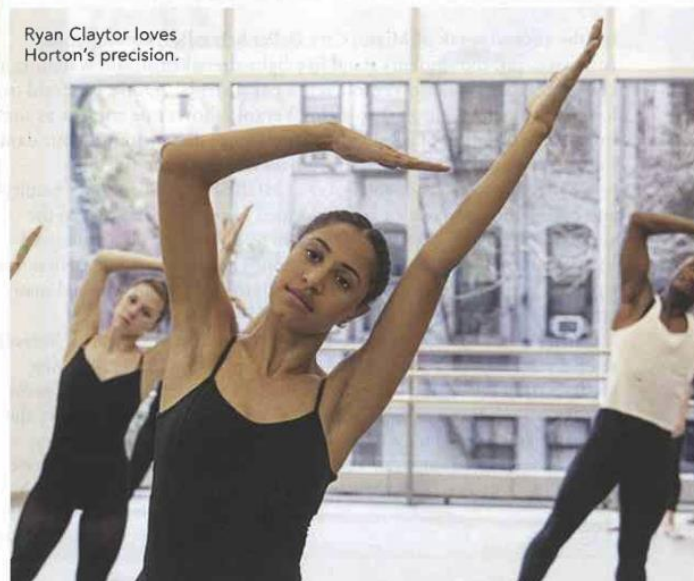


"Class is a performance," Guillermo Asca tells his level 2 Horton students. He reminds them that they never know who could be watching them. "You don't want to be photographed like this," he says, making a silly face. The room fills with laughter.

Asca, who's been with Ailey for 30 years (first as a student, and then as a company member), is mindful of how short the summer is, and how much technique he can realistically expect to impart. In addition to introducing some of the fortifications and preludes of the Horton style—tabletop flat-backs, hips swiveling in a figure-8 motion, energetic leg swings—"I want to plant the seeds of how to approach dance," he says. Ultimately, he wants students to make their movement interesting and dynamic, to remember that they don't have to be onstage to bring that quality to their dancing. "Anybody who sees a dance class will peek into that room, and somebody will capture their eye," Asca says. "That's the person who's dancing. You don't have to wait until you're level 4 or level 5 to start dancing."

When Ryan Claytor, 24, was exposed to Horton training in her first summer with Ailey, she quickly fell in love. "Horton is my all-time favorite," she says. "It's angular, it's precise, it's sharp, but it also has a little bit of flow to it." Claytor has participated in the Ailey intensive three times, and attends the school year-round as part of its scholarship program. Seeing Ray Mercer's choreography in previous summers, she knew she wanted to audition for his workshop. "In rehearsals with him, you learn a lot about yourself," she says. "You learn how to pick up on things quickly, how to make them your own." ■

Ryan Claytor loves Horton's precision.



Twenty-two-year-old Javontre Booker has attended the Ailey intensive three times, but he calls 2018 his "most mature" summer. "I think the most difficult thing for me right now, considering the fact I'm transitioning into the professional world, is knowing myself and knowing my self-worth," he says. He likes the combination of professionalism and guidance the program offers. As a tall dancer, Booker looks up to role models like Jamar Roberts, from the Ailey company. "Being the size that I am, often I'm told 'You're late' or 'Get all the way through that extension,'" he says. "When I watch him move, I never have those thoughts. I'm always like, 'How did he do that?'"

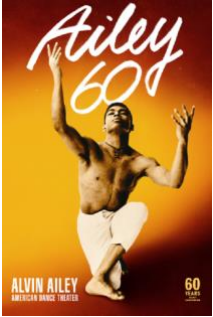
At the 2018 intensive, Booker accomplished one of his biggest goals—to make it into the Ailey scholarship program. He's now training at the school full-time, getting closer to his dream of joining the main company. He says, "I love the movement, I love the company, I love the mission."



## Alvin Ailey 60<sup>th</sup> Year Celebration: Judith Jamison, Robert Battle and More Honor the Legacy of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

By: Janice Williams

December 4, 2018



When Alvin Ailey set out to start his own dance company in New York City in 1958, he likely had no idea his passion and call to dance would result in a nearly 85,000-square-foot performance center bearing his name and thousands of students entering its doors day after day, while company dancers traveled to perform his choreography on stages around the globe. He certainly couldn't have known his effort to create a safe and esteemed place for dancers from all walks of life would extend well past his 1989 death, some 30 years.

Yet, here we are now, 60 years after Ailey first launched the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and the performing arts theater as well as its educational component, The Ailey School, is still flourishing exceedingly. The Ailey center is honoring the life and blood memories of Ailey with its special "Ailey Ascending" 60th-anniversary celebration, including worldwide performances of Ailey's most revered choreography with the addition of new works created as a thank you to the mastermind behind the theater and school.

Newsweek talked to Judith Jamison, the Artistic Director Emerita who helmed the company from 1989 to 2011, her successor Robert Battle and a number of company dancers about the significance of Ailey's legacy. Read Newsweek's interview with a few members of the Ailey company below.

### Judith Jamison, Artistic Director Emerita

#### What does the 60th anniversary mean to you?

It means generations of dancers and audiences have been sharing the love of what Mr. Ailey created 60 years ago. It takes [the audience], the incredible dancers in the company, our school and Mr. Ailey's genius to get to where we are now. We're living on his afterburn, we're living on the life he left us. The 60th anniversary is about celebrating the African American cultural expression and experience in the modern dance tradition of our country and serving our communities, but it's also about the love of a man who was a creative genius, who loved people. Mr. Ailey loved people, all walks of life, and he wanted his dancers and his company to be so accessible to everyone. It wasn't elitist, it wasn't only for certain people. It was for everyone. He always said, "Dance came from the people and should be delivered back to the people." And it's true. So we're living on the seeds that he planted 60 years ago.

#### Do you think he expected the company to go on for this long?

I don't know if he ever thought it was gonna continue this long or that we loved him this much to continue operating. If he was here today, I know he'd be smiling from ear to ear. He'd be so proud of us, as I am proud of the company now and the magnificent job they're doing on tour around the world, teaching. Think of where we started. He started with eight dancers and one performance. Here we are 60 years later in the beautiful state of the art Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater with outreach programs, extension programs, BSA programs and kids coming to study with us. Parents are bringing them as early as age 2. The junior students, the senior students, the professional students—it just goes on and on and on. Ailey camps, all over. Ten camps! It started with just one in Kansas City. Mr. Ailey thought this up. We're living on his dreams. We celebrate him every time the company comes on stage and that curtain goes up. When that dance starts, we are celebrating Alvin Ailey and what he did for us.

### Robert Battle, Artistic Director since 2011

#### What does this 60th anniversary mean to you?

It means Mr. Ailey's legacy continues to thrive, not just survive. For a modern dance company, actually any arts organization, longevity can be very difficult. When you think about a company surviving the death of its founder, Alvin Ailey, to now me being only the third artistic director after Judith Jamison, for it to continue to grow, to have our own permanent home with all of this wonderful space in New York City, I think it serves as a time to look back and reflect on where the company started and where we are today. So it really is an opportunity to reflect and then to spring forward into the future.



CTRL + Click photo to watch Ailey dancers perform to Beyoncé's "Freedom"



**People always say how Mr. Ailey was passionate about giving other dancers the chance to showcase their choreography. You recently introduced a few new pieces into the repertoire for the 60-year celebration. Was that intentional?**

It's important because it's a part of the continuum. That sense of nurturing new voices, new dances, new choreographers, it is vital to this organization because that means we have a future. So nurturing choreographers, as much as it is a selfless act it's a selfish act in the sense of needing those voices so that we can continue. There is

certainly something in the culture of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater that is very much about paying it forward. That, to me, is the lifeblood—certainly in the African American community—this idea of when you get over you reach back and you bring back as many people as you can. So beyond it being a programmatic thing, it really is a part of the heartbeat of this company because Alvin Ailey was so generous that way. That really is the foundation of this company.

**Constance Stamatiou, Company Dancer since 2007**

**What does this 60th anniversary mean to you?**

It's 60 years of keeping a man's vision alive, his legacy. It's inspiring. This was a small dream that he had and look how grand it's become! I wonder what he'd think about Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater now? Did he ever think his company would be this big, traveling all over the world and having so many outreach programs accessible for people everywhere of all ages? It's really special to be a part of.

**How does it feel to be a young woman so heavily involved in maintaining the history and everything Mr. Ailey set out to do when he first launched the school and theater 60 years ago?**

It's been quite the journey. I moved to New York from North Carolina to study at SUNY Purchase and I had a teacher there who taught at [Ailey's] summer program. She brought me to the summer program, and when I came here I was just in awe. I had never seen so many kids that looked like me, brown kids, in class. Growing up, I was usually the token girl in class. So I was awestruck about that and about the quality [in the way] the students were moving. There was so much passion, so much fire. It's just something about Mr. Ailey's choreography that touches everybody's soul. It draws you in. It's something you can relate to—how he always talks about "Revelations" being about his blood memories, growing up in the south in Rogers, Texas. Being a part of a company that celebrates all races and made a leeway for people of color to be involved in this art is truly extraordinary. I'm very grateful to be a part of.

**Courtney Celeste Spears, First-Year Company Dancer**

**How does it feel to be a part of such a rich dance legacy created by Mr. Ailey, a black man from Jim-Crow south?**

It's magical to walk on to a stage every day and being constantly reminded that there's so much more and you're a part of something that is so much larger than yourself. To walk into this space that's honoring 60 years of a legacy and tradition and honoring the mastermind, the genius behind all of it, is quite special. It's such a privilege and honor to be a part of something so grand.



**Why is it important to spread Mr. Ailey's legacy now in today's society?**

One of the most beautiful things about art and dance specifically is that it brings people together. It's something that unites people from all backgrounds, races, ethnicities, religion. It's timeless. One of the biggest things we're told all the time is that Mr. Ailey said, "Dance came to the people and should be given back to the people." We're in a time now where there's so much tension surrounding race and ethnicity and what you look like and political differences, but one of the beautiful things I think the Ailey company and Mr. Ailey has given us is timeless quality and energy that no matter where you're coming from in the world, no matter what language you speak, what political party you're with, your race—Ailey's work hits you at a core level, your soul. It's human.

It's so important to have places like this where people can feel united in what they're watching and the experience they're having when coming to see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. It's so important for young brown girls and boys and Latino boys and girls and Asian girls and boys to see people that look like them on stage thriving and not being portrayed as anything other than the beautiful God-given creatures they are and to see their history being explored and executed in complete living motion on stage. It's also great to teach people about a history that they might not be familiar with, people who did not grow up understanding African American hymns, rituals and baptisms or what it meant to grow up in the south for someone like Mr. Ailey.

That's the history for some audience members and it's a full circle moment for them, but for some, I feel like Mr. Ailey's work shows them a completely different perspective of what the black body can do and the way we celebrate it.

**Solomon Dumas, Company Dancer since 2016**

**What does it mean to be a part of the company during this milestone achievement?**

It means everything to me. Being an African American man and being able to have this platform to share my passion and to know that this has lasted 60 years and it's still thriving and it's still valid, it's still current, I'm blessed and thankful. I'm full of gratitude that we're still able to tour. The organization is still growing. I'm thankful for the organization because it's given me an opportunity to travel the world. It's given me the opportunity to be educated and be an ambassador. I'm really proud to be a part of an organization that celebrates the African American heritage in the modern dance tradition. We use dance as our way of educating people. We travel the world, we travel the country and we share our black excellence. We're still doing the work to acknowledge our own presence and our contributions as African Americans and this organization has put so many people on the map. It's helped artists of color, dancers of colors, choreographers of color, lighting directors of color, costume designers of color, composers of color. Ailey company celebrates that heritage and has been doing so for 60 years.

**What is the biggest thing you've learned from your experience with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater?**

The black experience is valid and it needs to be shared. Mr. Ailey created a piece called "Revelations" and it's one of the most famous works he's choreographed. It was choreographed in 1960, and it was a very prolific piece at that time and it still is. The thing about "Revelations" is it's based off his blood memories. His earlier character works are based off his blood memories of growing up in the segregated south, so it's his point of reference, his history. Of course, growing up in the segregated south at that time, the church was the hallmark of civilization for black people. He choreographed that piece based off his memories, but it shows our humanity, that we are human too and we experience joy and pain. It's a triumphant story nonetheless. No matter what you throw at us we tackle it, we persevere. And so that is the story that everybody can relate to. It's an unspoken communication and there's no denying this is a black piece that celebrates the black experience, but it's almost like a piece of history encapsulated. It's a period piece that shows you the African American story and how triumphant it is and how persevering it is and that transcends itself throughout the organization.



# Fordham News

## Fordham University: Ailey/Fordham Alumnus Joins Alvin Ailey American Dance Company

By: Tom Stoelker

December 3, 2018



When Christopher Wilson, FCLC '17, found out that he had made the company of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, he immediately called his mother, who screamed and dropped the phone. "It took, like, a good two minutes for her to come back to me, so I just sort of sat there, just listening to her, and I was also crying at the same time," he said.

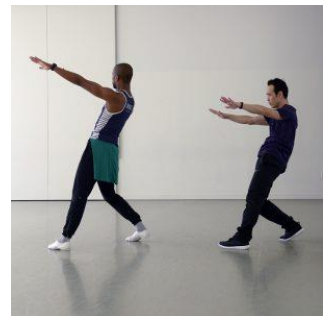
From the moment he saw the Alvin Ailey company perform in Atlanta when he was 11 years old, Wilson said he said to himself, "I want to be an Ailey dancer."

By the time he hit high school he was already researching how to get to New York and be near the company. He had discovered the [Ailey/Fordham BFA Program](#), which offers conservatory training in dance alongside a liberal arts curriculum. It became his first choice. He was accepted and received a [Founder's Scholarship](#).

"I think that the Founder's Scholarship and all of the aid I received, it just made my dreams come true," he said. When he arrived at Fordham, he recalled, he heard a guest speaker who told students that if they wrote their goal down on a piece of paper and posted it a wall in their home, it would help them realize their ambitions. Every year after, Wilson plastered the walls of his dorm with posters of Ailey II, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's junior company that serves as a bridge between The Ailey School and the professional dance world.

"So every morning, I woke up, I saw those, and every night before I went to bed, I saw those," he said. "When you see something so often, I think it just sort of trains your mind, unconsciously, to really go for that thing. You could just see it as, 'Oh, it's just a picture on a wall.' No, it's a dream."

But making that dream a reality required hard work and focus, he said. And it all paid off when he made it into Ailey II in his senior year and into the main company this past spring. This month, Wilson will be dancing in a production called *EN*, which was recently created for the company by choreographer Jessica Lang. As the company takes up its residency at City Center for five weeks in December, audiences will get several chances to see the new ballet.



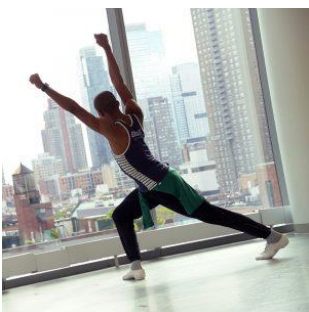
"I saw the piece when it premiered, and I was just blown away," he said of the Lincoln Center opening from this past June.

After spending the summer learning the company's repertoire, this fall he began to learn the new piece. Lang's husband, Kanji Segawa, also a member of the company, walked Wilson through the steps at Ailey's dance studios, which sit just down the street from Fordham Lincoln Center on Ninth Avenue.

Wilson remembers the short walk between the two campuses as the moment he got to savor New York as his home. He said he very much appreciated having the "college experience that every young adult wants to have," alongside the rigor of the conservatory. That pairing made him see that Fordham's "men and women for others" ethos is as an inherent part of being a performer.

"In a physical and literal sense ... I am dancing to help someone feel something, whether that be happiness, sadness, inspiration, anger," he said. "I think that's why people come and see dance. Because they want to see their stories portrayed on stage, and that's our job as dancers, to do just that."

He added that studying dance in New York can't compare to anywhere else. "I would say New York City is definitely the center of the dance world," he said. "It is a goal for a lot of dancers—most dancers actually."



Hailing from the comparatively small city of Augusta, Georgia, Wilson said his Founder's scholarship made a "small town boy's dreams come true" and that he hopes to inspire other young boys like his 11-year-old self.

"It's just an image that is forever burned into my mind because now that I'm here, I always think back to what brought me here," he said. "I'm dancing for that little black boy in a small town who wants to go on and do big things, but doesn't know that he can. I dance to let him know that it's possible."

## Why Study Horton

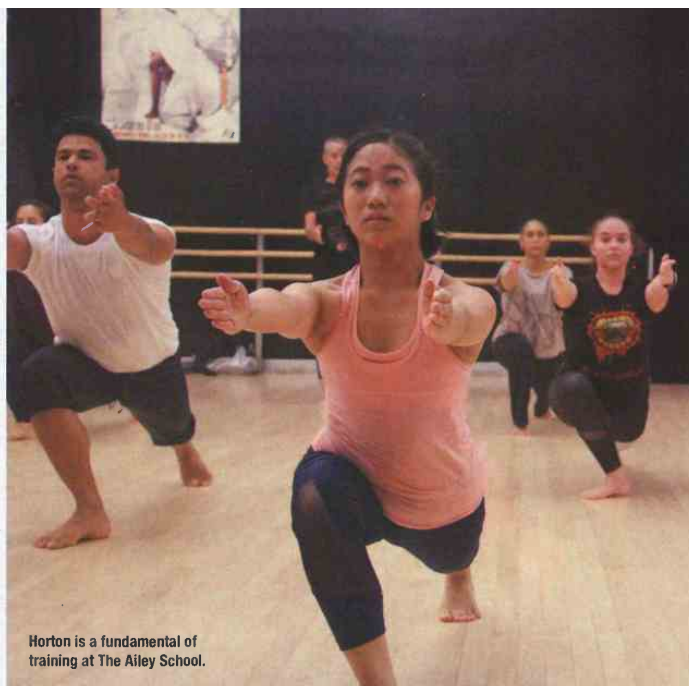
By: Rachel Rizzuto

November 2018 Issue

# WHY STUDY HORTON

A dancer discovers the satisfactions of learning the famously demanding technique.

BY RACHEL RIZZUTO



Horton is a fundamental of training at The Ailey School.

Ana Marie Forsythe's eyes twinkle, and a smile plays at the corners of her mouth as she welcomes the 40-plus teachers who are enrolled for her two-week-long Horton teacher-training workshop at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater studios in New York City—plus me, a dancer and writer, taking part for the day. As we watch *Genius on the Wrong Coast*, a film about Lester Horton, the “princess of Horton” (as someone aptly refers to Forsythe) offers her own version of a director's commentary: She identifies faces as they appear onscreen and interjects her own narration (“Fortification 15—that's the one I hated so much,” she says).

Forsythe has taught Horton at AAADT since 1973 and continues to mine the technique daily for its legendary specificity and discipline.

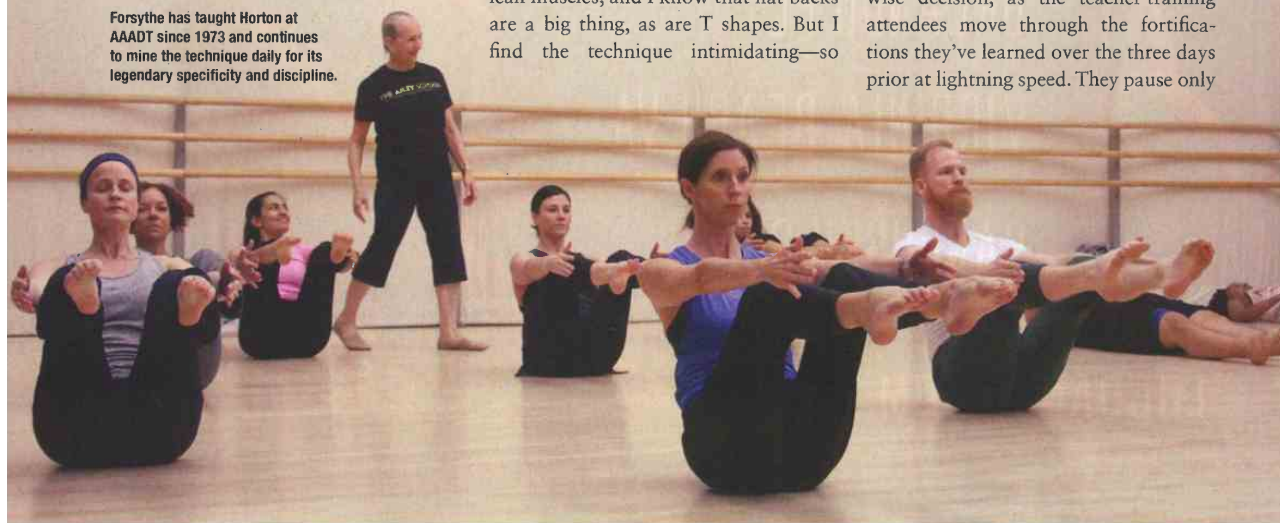
The people featured in the film—Ailey, Carmen de Lavallade, Joyce Trisler—are her former teachers and mentors, the ones from whom she learned about Horton and who encouraged her to take up residence at AAADT, where she's taught the technique since 1973, chairing the Horton department since 1979. Forsythe has more than half a century of Horton technique under her belt, and that is precisely why I am afraid: because the rest of this day is devoted to practicing the elements of Horton, a technique I have never studied.

I've heard about it, of course. Like any good student, I know my dance history. I know that Horton builds long and lean muscles, and I know that flat backs are a big thing, as are T shapes. But I find the technique intimidating—so

many exercises, or “fortifications,” to memorize, so much terminology, so many muscles to engage. So why am I game to try it? Because anyone would be crazy to pass up the opportunity to take Horton from Forsythe, who still mines it daily for the specificity and discipline she first discovered as a young dancer. As a teacher, she transcends the demands of the technique, making it an accessible movement study, rich in detail and context.

**“There should be some atmosphere to it. Look mysterious!”**

I opt to observe the first movement class of the day. This ends up being a wise decision, as the teacher-training attendees move through the fortifications they've learned over the three days prior at lightning speed. They pause only







Forsythe conducts her annual Horton training for teachers.

when someone has a question about sequence or specifics, or when Forsythe needs to troubleshoot an exercise. She's constantly offering up tidbits of wisdom as she roves around the studio to tweak positions.

"Sometimes, you do have to adjust your position," she says, when an attendee struggles with release swings (moving from a flat-back position on one side of the body to the other, with a dipped swing of the torso). "Just be discreet. Don't forget—you can modify." During figure eights, which require hip isolations as the arms stay at right angles to the body, she urges the group to give their port de bras real weight. "Like you're resting something on your arms," she says. "This is from a film [that Horton choreographed], *White Savage*—you're coming out of the jungle, so there should be some atmosphere to it. Look mysterious!"

"Remember what the subtitle of this is?" she asks, as they prepare to complete dimensional tonus, a study that includes directional changes and long, head-to-toe stretches. "The yawn stretch!" her students respond. "That's exactly what you should be feeling," she reminds them. "Afterward, you should be completely toned." She pauses, the twinkle in her eyes still present. "Dimensionally, that is."

But Forsythe can be firm, too. When, near the end of class, she teaches an extended phrase on the right side that's a hodgepodge of movement from the fortifications and studies they've just completed, she leaves the dancers to figure out the left side on their own, on the spot. "Remember," she says, "I'll never show you the other side. That's your job, not mine."

#### **"If you aren't physically or emotionally ready to fall, don't."**

After a quick lunch break, it's time to learn new material—and I've officially decided to be brave and join in. Like the rest of the workshop participants, I keep paper and a pen nearby to jot down notes. We begin with fortification 11, which requires moving from a seated triangle position on the floor to a squat, second-position grand plié, standing position or jump into the air—depending on what part of the fortification you're on—in a single count. It is here that I experience my first beginner's success; I am lucky enough to have a long Achilles tendon, which makes the shift from the ground to the next position significantly easier. I beam as Forsythe praises my transition and Achilles and feel briefly confident that I am a natural.

This reverie is quickly upended by the next two exercises, lateral and back falls. As their names suggest, they involve falling directly to the ground either sideways or backwards, in far too few counts: first four, then two. Forsythe knows the bodies before her vary widely in age and ability. "If you aren't physically or emotionally ready to fall, don't," she warns. She understands the primary directive: that these men and women leave the workshop week with the knowledge needed to competently pass this technique on to their students.

By the end of class, I'm spending more and more time writing notes and less time attempting the movement. I can feel soreness already beginning to set into my quadriceps and lower back. I smell the unmistakable scent of *Icy Hot*, and I know I am in good company. I've gone on a long mental journey over the last several hours, I realize—at first, I found myself thinking there was no way I'd be able to do Horton, that I'd have to be superhuman to be successful at it. But I found myself surprised by own ability at the day's end. I suppose that's Forsythe's special gift. **DT**

*Rachel Rizzuto is currently pursuing her MFA in dance at the University of Illinois.*





Students from  
The Ailey School  
perform an  
excerpt from  
*Revelations*.

## HISTORY IN MOTION

One way students can explore dance's past is by learning historical repertory. Ailey/Fordham BFA students take Black Traditions in American Dance and World Dance History, which are often coordinated with repertory classes. "The movement shows you a different side of what you're learning in the classroom," says Marie Paspé, a recent graduate of the program, who learned *Blues Suite* and *Revelations* from Ailey II artistic director emerita Sylvia Waters. "When you study dance history, you receive knowledge from past generations that you wouldn't normally consider in the studio. This changed the way I move and think of dance."

April 2014

theory & practice

## Kid-Friendly Modern Classes

Creative movement's natural next step

BY JEN PETERS

Parents enter their children in dance class with visions of pink ballet slippers or cool tap shoes. But bare feet? Modern dance? Not necessarily the dream they had in mind. Young students often jump from creative movement—the perfect introduction to any modern technique—straight into ballet, bypassing modern until high school or even college.

Yet teaching modern to children shapes future well-rounded, adventure-seeking dancers—students who are not afraid to really run, slide on the floor or create movement. “Children in modern are able to express themselves using their entire body, and they can break the rules of ballet by finding freedom in movement,” says Tiffany Barnes, director of the Junior Division at The Ailey School in New York City. Learning technique is undeniably important, but through improvisation and developing expansive movement, modern adds another dimension to young students’ dance vocabulary. Here, Barnes and other experienced teachers share how they tailor fun, constructive classes for children.

### Imaginative Technique

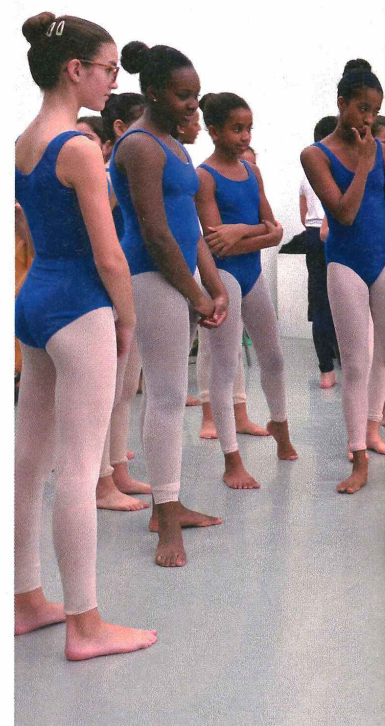
Modern techniques come with a wide array of movement vocabularies, some better equipped for children than others. The Ailey School dives into Horton technique between ages 7 and 10 for boys and 11 and 12 for girls. Unlike more contemporary fusion classes, Horton has a very defined progression of warm-ups, exercises and fortifications. The technique’s clarity of shape grabs young students’

attention immediately, but it is challenging. “I’ve realized that students don’t have to learn everything right away,” says Barnes. Rather than teach an entire overwhelming phrase, break off small chunks at a time—just feet and legs, or just arms. Students will build strength slowly without getting frustrated.

Teaching language should remain fun, peppered with detailed imagery. Barnes suggests scaffolding imagery by starting simply with one idea, then building upon that image. For example, with the Horton side hip push, she asks students to pretend they have a rock tied to one leg. How does it feel? How does it affect the movement? Students act out the action first, then return to technical terms and drag the rock in a straight line across the floor, with the working leg straight and pointed.

While a traditional modern class may not be suitable until later for most students, both Lydia Hance from Hope Stone Kids in Houston, Texas, and Tanya Bello from the ODC School in San Francisco interweave basic modern principles into their classes as early as 5 or 6 years old. “I focus on the spine as the base of all movement,” says Bello. “I teach head-tail connection, roll-downs, curves and spirals from the spine.”

When Hance approaches elements like drop swings, she has students imagine they are on a roller coaster ride, or that they have a hiccup at the top of the swing. With pliés into over-curves or side curves, she asks them to “pour hot chocolate into mugs on the floor.” Imagery works wonders for all ages, but



**“Children in modern can express themselves with their entire body and break the rules of ballet.”**

—Tiffany Barnes

it is especially effective when tackling alignment issues or tricky steps that are difficult for young students to grasp.

### Music Matters

Music should be very different from that of ballet class, even if you have a piano accompanist. Integrating atypical meters, such as 5- or 7-count phrases, can really shake things up for students used to counting in 8s. The Ailey School’s Horton classes use drums, with a lot of 6/8, swing-like rhythms. “Percussion, with different beats and rhythms, really turns their world upside down (or sideways!),” says Barnes. “Kids see it as a chance to break out and really dance.”

Photo by Eduardo Palino, courtesy of The Ailey School





Tiffany Barnes, The Ailey School's Junior Division director, teaching Horton technique

No live musicians? No problem. Hance enjoys mixing up her class playlist with various artists ranging from Paul Simon to Bach, again using a mixture of meters. She prefers dynamic songs, but if students have trouble focusing, she'll begin with something more calming before working up to more energetic tracks.

### Explore, Discover and Get Moving

Whatever the technique, modern has the ability to unlock creative possibilities. As Hope Stone's education director, Hance gives students as young as 4 creative control of choreographic elements like tempo, shape, spatial patterns and level variation.

"I give them opportunities to think critically about movement and be empowered to make their own decisions," says Hance. "Kids just need to dance sometimes without being told exactly what to do." Barnes agrees, saying that young students enter the studio with such personality and "an innate performance quality that we don't want to stifle." The Ailey School's First Steps and Bounding Boys programs, for ages 3–6 and 4–6, incorporate an improvisational

free dance during each class.

ODC starts with creative movement at age 4 and introduces technique around ages 8 and 9. Improvisation remains an integral part of the class, increasing in complexity as students mature. Bello says her students really look forward to it. "Many dancers are scared to do anything beyond what they are told. With modern experience they are more vulnerable and excited about trying new ideas."

Game-like structures like freeze dances, follow the leader and mirroring a partner are great for breaking improvisation. Be mindful of letting the little ones run amok, though. Provide structure and direction to free dances. Suggesting level changes, mood changes and various movement qualities or tempos—round, smooth, sharp, fast, slow, straight, wiggly, loose, tight, etc.—will keep young minds on track while challenging them to think outside the movement box. **DT**

*Jen Peters is a former dancer with Jennifer Muller/The Works.*