

'Ailey' Trailer: Neon's Hypnotic Documentary Portrait of Dance Visionary Alvin Ailey

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From “The Painter and the Thief” to “Apollo 11” and “Gunda,” Neon is proving to be a rich home to documentary film. The latest entry from the distributor is Jamila Wignot’s “Ailey,” a documentary about multi-hyphenate dancer, choreographer, director, and activist Alvin Ailey, who up until his death in 1989 inspired generations of dancers and founded the towering Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. “Ailey,” which first premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival to rave reviews, releases on July 23 in theaters. Watch the official trailer for the film below.

Here’s the official synopsis, courtesy of Neon: “Many know the name Alvin Ailey, but how many know the man? Ailey’s commitment to searching for truth in movement resulted in pioneering and enduring choreography that centers on African American experiences. Director Jamila Wignot’s resonant biography grants artful access to the elusive visionary who founded one of the world’s most renowned dance companies, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.”

Among the film’s many admirers at the virtual Park City festival this year was IndieWire’s own Jude Dry, who wrote in their review: “Using audio interviews with Ailey from the end of his life as a guiding narration, director Jamila Wignot weaves a pastiche of archival footage from the Deep South, New York City in the ’70s, and a vast trove of Ailey dances to create a hypnotic, immersive portrait of the visionary choreographer. Dance fans will flip for the absurd display of rare performances the ‘Ailey’ team have uncovered (archival producer Rebecca Kent deserves a special shout-out), which includes original performances of some of Ailey’s most famous pieces. Editor Annukka Lilja (‘Mr. Soul!’) casts a kind of magic between layers of decades-apart performance footage, resurrecting lithe and limber figures as if from dream, their otherworldly athleticism captured on grainy celluloid.”

Ailey died of AIDS-related causes at the age of 58, and while gay, he was notoriously private about his personal affairs. But the film does take a look at his relationship with a Parisian man who followed him to New York, only to abandon him there. Ailey’s mother also emerges as a central figure in the dancer’s life.

Neon’s other upcoming releases include the documentaries “All Light, Everywhere” and “Flee.”



Ctrl + Click to watch video.