

# Houston CityBook

## In Homecoming Show, Isabel Wallace-Green Dances Her Way Back to Jones Hall with Alvin Ailey Company

By: Chris Becker

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HOUSTON-BORN DANCER AND arts educator Isabel Wallace-Green vividly recalls seeing a performance of Alvin Ailey's landmark 1960 dance work *Revelations* as a child, peering over a high balcony in Jones Hall. "The dancers were pretty small!" laughs Wallace-Green, who nevertheless was captivated, especially by a section in *Revelations* titled "Wade in the Water," where translucent white, cobalt, and aquamarine cloths are stretched across the stage to evoke baptismal waters and — for African American slaves — the riverbed as a pathway to freedom. "I'd never seen anything like that."

Now based in New York as a member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Wallace-Green is looking forward to her first Houston performance with the company [March 7-9 at Jones Hall](#), the same venue where she first witnessed Ailey's genius. "It's always special to come back to Houston, especially since it's a place that fostered me and set me in motion to do what I am doing now," says Wallace-Green. "I'm so grateful for all of the communities I was a part of, and to be able to return to that is very full circle."

Those communities include Houston Ballet Academy, where she trained for nine years, and studied with Cheryne Busch as her primary instructor. Wallace-Green cites Lauren Anderson, the first Black principal dancer at Houston Ballet, as a role model whose presence and accessibility affirmed that a career as a Black ballerina was not unusual or unattainable. "Her expertise and her demanding excellence was the greatest motivator," says Wallace-Green of Anderson's instruction. "I understood if you worked hard, that it was achievable."

*Revelations* is on the bill for all three of the Houston performances, along with contemporary works by Ronald K. Brown, Alonzo King, Kyle Abraham, and Jamar Roberts set to music ranging from Duke Ellington, Drake, Erykah Badu, Radiohead, and experimental composer Miguel Frascóni. (*Revelations* has retained its score of powerfully sung traditional spirituals, which recall Ailey's childhood church-going experiences in rural Texas.)

For Wallace-Green — who is also a talented choreographer, and premiered her solo *Resilience* at UH's Blaffer Art Museum in response to Jamal Cyrus' exhibit, *The End of My Beginning* — the creation of new repertoire is just as important as maintaining a connection to classics like *Revelations*. "That's why I love to be a part of a repertory company where we get to do so many different types of movement," says Wallace-Green. The new and the old help nurture a more inclusive and forward-thinking dance community.

*Revelations* is the rare work that audiences applaud before any movement or music begins. For Wallace-Green, it is nothing less than "a celebration of humanity," shared from an African American perspective, but rooted in basic human experiences, from tragic to joyous, that anyone, regardless of their identity, can relate to. "It has something that really pulls at us as human beings," says Wallace-Green. "By the end of it, audiences are so excited and on their feet, clapping along with us while we're dancing."