

Heights dancer returns to Houston with the acclaimed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

By: Rubena Gracia

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This March, audiences in Houston will have the opportunity to experience a historic dance company and a historic work of art. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was founded by its namesake, dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey, in 1958. Soon after, drawing upon music from gospel, spirituals, and blues, he started creating a work that evoked childhood images of his family and of attending church in Rogers, Texas, which he called “blood memories.” The result was his iconic work, *Revelations*, that premiered in New York in 1960. In over six decades, the work has been performed all over the world. In 1968, it was part of the Olympic Opening Ceremonies and has been presented numerous times at the White House.

Isabel Wallace-Green, a Houston native, joined Alvin Ailey in July 2023. Isabel was recently in Philadelphia on tour with the company, where she had a chance to speak to the Leader. This was the seventh stop on the tour, with four performances set for the last weekend in February. The company will perform in four more cities before reaching Houston.

Isabel said she is exhausted, but the tour is going well. She enjoys traveling and seeing parts of the country she might not otherwise visit. When possible, she explores a city as a tourist, with the priority of finding a good local restaurant.

Isabel grew up in the Heights. Her parents have lived in the same house since before Isabel was born. She was fortunate to grow up in an artsy household, she said. Her father Leamon Green, an artist, is a professor at Texas Southern University where he teaches visual art and is the interim chairperson of the TSU Fine Arts Department. One of his pieces is displayed at Bush Intercontinental Airport and two can be found in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. He has also had numerous solo exhibitions throughout Texas, and one in Tanzania after receiving the Fulbright award, which allowed him to teach there for one year. Her mother Susan Wallace, a private school arts and art history teacher, taught visual arts at the prestigious St. John’s School during the time Isabel attended high school there. Isabel studied dance and choreography there, and enjoyed participating in musicals.

She studied with the Houston Ballet Academy for nine years, starting at the original building on West Gray at age six and finishing the last couple of years at the new building downtown. She is grateful for the educational and foundational training, as well as technical expertise, she received there.

As a child, she attended a performance of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at Jones Hall. Later, she attended a performance in New York and “fell in love with everything they do.”

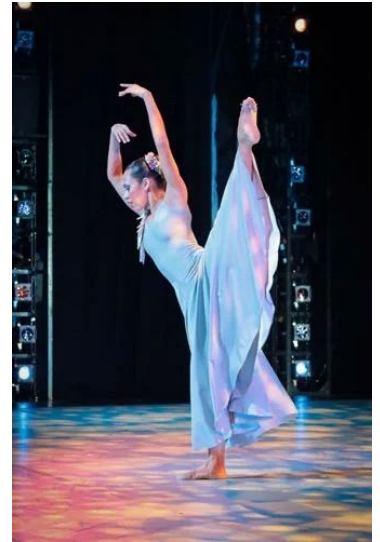
Isabel graduated summa cum laude from the Ailey/Fordham BFA program with a dual degree in Dance and African/African American Studies. The program is a partnership with the Ailey School and Fordham University created to provide a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance to prepare graduates for a career in the dance profession. Both institutions are located near Lincoln Center in New York City. Isabel noted that Alvin Ailey offers many different styles of dance – ballet, modern, West African, jazz – and said that working with a repertory company is a great experience.

Isabel also trained at programs such as the Boston Ballet School and Dance Theatre of Harlem. In addition to Alvin Ailey, she has danced professionally with New Chamber Ballet, Urban Souls Dance Company in Houston, Dance Afrikana, and the Radio City Christmas Spectacular in New York. She has served on faculty at studios throughout New York City,

Houston, and in Dallas, where she held a position with the Dallas Black Dance Theatre. Isabel hosted a masterclass in January 2024 at the Institute of Contemporary Dance in Houston, which is located on Houston Avenue.

She spoke about one particular work, “Resilience: Dance Performance by Isabel Wallace-Green,” which was her first solo show, premiering in September 2021. The event was a partnership with The University Museum at Texas Southern University and the Blaffer Art Museum at University of Houston, where the piece was performed. A four-month exhibit titled “Jamal Cyrus: The End of My Beginning” displayed over 50 works by Mr. Cyrus, professor at TSU and a noted Houston artist. “Resilience” was an interactive performance in which she traveled throughout the galleries to perform the different dances, highlighting the art in the exhibit. It allowed the audience to experience Cyrus’ multimedia exhibition and Wallace-Green’s performance at the same time.

Isabel looks forward to the performances in Houston’s Jones Hall. “Returning home and performing in downtown Houston a few blocks away from the Houston Ballet Academy – that experience will be a full-circle and fulfilling moment for me.”



Revelations will be featured at each of the four performances. The Performing Arts Houston website explains the cultural significance of this piece: “Each performance by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater culminates in Ailey’s masterwork, *Revelations*. Seen by over 23 million people around the world, *Revelations* is the most experienced contemporary dance work of all time.” Isabel commented that when Ailey’s signature work is performed, the audience applauds at the beginning of the piece because it connects with their emotions.

Isabel always appreciates coming home, and said, “I am excited to share this next chapter in my journey with this community that means so much to me.”

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will perform March 7-9, 2024, in Jones Hall, located downtown at 615 Louisiana Street in the Theater District. For tickets, please visit the Performing Arts Houston website at performingartshouston.org.