



## [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Starts 4 Year Residency In LA — Where It All Began](#)

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When 31-year-old professional dancer Coral Dolphin was 5 years old, she saw the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Company perform at The Music Center's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Dolphin, who is from South Central, remembers feeling a sense of joy and excitement to see dancers perform the late world-renowned Alvin Ailey's magnum opus *Revelations* in person.

"I wanted to do that," Dolphin says.

Now the new Alvin Ailey dancer gets her chance. Decades later, Dolphin is performing on that same stage in her hometown.

This month, the company launched a four-year residency at The Music Center. To kick it off, the company will perform at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion Wednesday, March 20 to Sunday, March 24. It's a part of The Music Center's Arts program: Gloria Kaufman Presents Dance at The Music Center.

While New York City is known for being the mecca for theatrical dance, L.A. is more known for commercial dance because it's the global epicenter for music, TV and film entertainment. There are dance studios like Millennium and PLAYGROUND LA that export talent for industry commercial work. Dolphin says L.A. is a staple and many dancers want to come to the region and perform here, especially at one of the most prestigious theaters in L.A.

While the Debbie Allen Dance Academy alumna has been a commercial dancer for Beyoncé, Janet Jackson and Madonna, Dolphin says theater dancing is a completely different beast, especially as an older Ailey dancer.

"This is my first time dancing at this caliber," Dolphin says. "Ailey is prestigious. People are in their prime youthful years joining Ailey. It's caught my body. It's caught my faith. It's caught my mind all by surprise. I'm just really grateful to be here and more so grateful that my body is even still capable of doing this because I haven't done this kind of technical work in a very long time."

Dolphin says there is one piece in particular that will resonate with the younger L.A. crowd. Kyle Abraham's *Are You In Your Feelings?* is what Dolphin says is "very L.A."



"We got Jhene Aiko and Kendrick Lamar on the playlist," Dolphin says. "I think the younger crowd is gonna eat that up. They're gonna be inspired by these new works."

### Where it all began

The Alvin Ailey company's arrival to Los Angeles comes at a special time in the troupe's history: The modern dance group was founded by Ailey in New York City in March 1958, exactly 65 years ago.

But his start began in L.A. decades earlier.

Ailey moved from Rogers, Texas to L.A. in 1941, a year after his mother moved to the city. He went to George Washington Carver Middle School and graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School.

When Ailey was a teenager, he saw the Katherine Dunham Company perform. He studied African and Caribbean dance under Dunham, who was recognized as a pioneer in the field. Her company was a crucial part of Hollywood, Broadway and theaters for more than 30 years.



In 1953, Ailey started studying dance with the famed Lester Horton, whose L.A.-based dance company was one of the first permanent and racially integrated modern dance schools in the nation. He learned various techniques from ballet and Native American dance. After Horton's death, Ailey took over as the artistic director and choreographer for his late mentor's dance company. It was his early L.A. exposure to dance that launched his New York City career on Broadway and later, his own company which focused on showcasing Black expression, experiences and culture through modern dance.

#### What to expect

Like Dolphin, this four-year partnership with The Music Center is also a homecoming for Ailey's artistic director Matthew Rushing, who has been a part of the company for over 30 years. Like Ailey, the Inglewood homegrown started his dance training in L.A. Over time, he has held various positions within the company as a dancer, choreographer, rehearsal director and most recently as the artistic director.

"I am returning to the place where I first fell in love with dance," Rushing says. "It's such an affirming journey and it speaks to the power of art. It speaks to the power of dreams."

The company first appeared at The Music Center in 1998 and has performed for L.A. audiences 11 times. The group's last time performing in L.A. was two years ago.

Rushing says there are a couple of ballets that L.A. audiences will see for their first time. One of them is Amy Hall Garner's *CENTURY*, which is the choreographer's first time with the company. It's a celebration of a grandfather who just turned 100 years old and will include music from Black music legends Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Ray Charles. Abraham's *Are You in Your Feelings?* will also have its L.A. premiere. The audience will also get to see Jamar Roberts' *Ode*, Ronald K. Brown's *Dancing Spirit* and Ailey's 63-year-old classic *Revelations*.

"It fits right in with Ailey's vision of celebrating African American culture," Rushing says.



As a performer, Dolphin says every place has its own energy, but she is excited about the enthusiasm that the L.A. audience will bring, especially when she recalls seeing Ailey in L.A. before she danced with the company.

"Being from L.A., I remember going to see Ailey and just screaming at the top of my lungs every time they came," Dolphin says. "There was just so much rawness that we gave to the dancers. It's beautiful to be on the other end giving it to them and then at the end of all that we've given, they give it back to us. It's like an exchange and I think that it'll be nice to do it with L.A."