

The Fordham Ram

Fordham Celebrates 25 Years of Fordham/Ailey Program

By: Julianna Morales

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The Ailey/Fordham Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) program in dance is hosting the “Celebrating 25 Years” Dance Benefit Concert at the Ailey Citigroup Theater at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, April 15. The event is open to alumni, staff, students, family and the public and will begin with a cocktail reception. The performances will follow, beginning at 7 p.m.

Fordham News wrote that in its 25 years, the Ailey/Fordham BFA program has produced hundreds of professional dancers, teachers, lawyers and nonprofit leaders. Both of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Co-Directors Melanie Person and Dr.

Robert Clark of The Ailey School and Fordham University, respectively, stated that numerous students from the program have gained a level of fame in their career after the program.

When the program began in 1998, it was the only BFA in dance in the country. According to the program’s website, the students in the program are considered full-time students at both institutions. The BFA is a four-year degree which combines dance and liberal arts education while providing access to two renowned institutions.

“We’ve had dancers who have been in very famous shows, like in the original cast of ‘The Lion King,’ we’ve had dancers like Ally Love who danced professionally and now is doing a Netflix show with dancers, stuff like that,” Clark explained. “You have dancers like Courtney Spears who danced with the Premiere Company but then, you know, she went on Princess Grace, she’d been considered Forbes’ ‘30 Under 30 – Art & Style.’”

Person shared a similar sentiment, stating, “The students from the program go on, at least on the dance side, to the top dance companies in the world.” However, professional dancers differ significantly in terms of salary compared to other professional athletes, as it does not pay particularly well. Person stated that the liberal arts education that students in the Ailey/Fordham program receive increases their opportunities for second jobs or sources of income that they may need compared to studying at an observatory. Clark also acknowledged that, even with a successful dance career, it is common to pursue a second career because of the young retirement age of dancers.

In order to get into the Ailey/Fordham BFA program, students must complete two separate applications. They must complete the Common App Fordham application as well as The Ailey School application. Person explained that these two applications are reviewed individually by each school to determine if they would admit them. Once this is done, Person sends the students that she would admit to Ailey to Fordham Admissions, and they find the students that both schools would accept to admit to the program.

Those enrolled in the Ailey/Fordham BFA are given very busy schedules in order to complete the course requirements for both their dance studies and liberal arts studies. “They usually take two or three dance classes a day at Ailey, their liberal arts course at Fordham, they have rehearsals at night in addition to their dance classes and take dance academic courses,” explained Person. Clark commented on the potential tight fit of the schedules, mentioning that students are often running to change from their dance clothes and get back to Fordham for their other classes.

Both Clark and Person stated that one of the biggest changes in the program throughout its years has been the number of students in the program that choose to pursue a double major. “50% of students are completing a double major at Fordham in addition to the liberal arts course included in their BFA,” Clark stated. He explained that the dance students offer a lot to Fordham, noting that to dance at the level required at Ailey alongside academic work requires a high degree of organization and intelligence that contributes greatly to Fordham.

Clark also explained that the program has continued to become more and more competitive, saying that each year the number of applicants increases although only about 30 students are accepted a year. The students in recent years have also shown increasing focus on their academic aspirations as opposed to being more directed at solely dance like in the program's early years.

Clark explained that both Fordham President Tania Tetlow and Rev. Joseph M. McShane, S.J., president emeritus, have spoken of those in the Ailey program as Fordham's top athletes. Despite this, they are not offered the same opportunities to athletic scholarships as those in more traditional college sports.

Clark stated that the Ailey/Fordham program is working to improve the tracking and honoring of alumni successes outside of the dance world, with many having become successful lawyers, doctors and more to further demonstrate the academic achievements of the students graduating the programs.

Clark and Person encourage students from both Fordham campuses to attend the performances of the Ailey/Fordham program, such as the Benefit Concert. Clark explained that students often have access to more affordable rush-tickets the night before the performance they wish to see as well, making the shows more accessible.