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Alvin Ailey's Hope Boykin on How MLK Inspired Her New Work

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Two years ago, [Hope Boykin](#), the powerhouse dancer and choreographer who has been a member of the [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater](#) for the past 17 years, was in Atlanta for a performance. The Company, along with the rest of the country, was celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Movement, so it was only natural that Boykin pay a visit to the Civil and Human Rights Museum.

While there, she came across a room where they were playing rarely seen footage of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s funeral. An excerpt of his sermon, "The Drum Major Instinct," filled the room.

...If I can help somebody as I pass along, If I can cheer somebody with a word or song, If I can show somebody he's traveling wrong, Then my living will not be in vain. If I can do my duty as a Christian ought, If I can bring salvation to a world once wrought, If I can spread the message as the master taught, Then my living will not be in vain

By the time Dr. King's last word was spoken, Boykin felt a spark and started moving.

"I like words, but I like movement even more," she tells EBONY.com. "The articulation of ideas and thoughts, life's trials and frustrations, personal goals and dreams I can easily share through movement. It's how I communicate."



While on tour for the next few months, and then back in New York, Boykin couldn't stop moving, though she wasn't sure where she was going just yet.

"I didn't know what this movement was or what it could be. For the first time, I was creating something where the movement came before the music," explains the Durham, North Carolina native who has been dancing since she was four years old.

Boykin stayed with the movement and when it made sense, she presented the idea to Ailey artistic director Robert Battle. He loved it.

"Hope is a brilliant artist, and this idea that activism can change the world is a cornerstone of what Ailey is about," he says. "Also thought that it was very timely, though I had no idea just how timely it would be."

He gave it the green light, and Boykin was ready to move forward.

"I knew which dancers could portray which characters," says Boykin, "And they went all out."

From there, she commissioned an original score by Ali Jackson of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, historic and original text was narrated by Tony Award winner Leslie Odom Jr. from *Hamilton*, and she named the piece "r-Evolution Dream," to honor Dr. King.

For Boykin, who has choreographed works for Ailey in the past, this opportunity is a dream come true. So what does she hope people will get from "r-Evolution, Dream"?

"To stay in the spirit of Dr. King," she explains. "I hope that people will take a little something away, whether it's humming a line of music or remembering a word. It's all fine with me."

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater season begins Nov 30-Dec 31 at the New York City Center. 'r-Evolution, Dream' debuts on December 9th and will be performed on a 2017 national tour. For information on how to buy tickets visit [AlvinAiley.org](#)