

OUT100



THE ALVIN AILEY DANCERS

Yannick Lebrun, Michael Francis McBride, Samuel Lee Roberts, Daniel Harder, Vernard J. Gilmore & Jermaine Terry

In March of 1958, Alvin Ailey and his company jetted onto the stage with a legendary performance at the 92nd Street Y—and the world of dance was never the same. Now approaching its 60th anniversary, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues to expand on the legacy of its late founder, one of many great gay luminaries to succumb to AIDS (he passed away in 1989).

With a new, 10,000-square-foot wing at The Joan Weill Center for Dance; new productions by Twyla Tharp, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, and Talley Beatty; and a 21-city North American tour kicking off in January, the dancers in Ailey's theater are sharing his tenacious spirit with new generations, as well as experiencing their own milestones. This past May, Michael Francis McBride and Samuel Lee Roberts got engaged in a very dancer-appropriate ceremony: an elaborately choreographed flash-mob number. Roberts had been planning the stunt for nearly a full year, and McBride was suitably caught off guard. "Tears still come to my eyes thinking about his proposal," McBride says.

Perhaps because of their impending nuptial bliss, Roberts and McBride are optimistic about their place in the country. Vernard J. Gilmore, however, has a different outlook. "It's always been scary for me as a queer American," he says. "Even though we see more tolerance, acceptance seems far off. That shouldn't have to be asked for—it should just be a part of being human."

All of the dancers—including Yannick Lebrun, a native of French Guiana and the face (and body) of Ailey's 2016–17 season—hope that their chosen art form will not only entertain, but move and inspire. "I first started dance because I saw a lecture demonstration given by the Dance Theatre of Harlem," says Jermaine Terry. "Whenever I do a mini performance for children, I always dance for the child that was once me in the audience." Daniel Harder agrees, saying, "I hope whenever someone sees me perform, they see a reflection of themselves."

PHOTOGRAPHED AT ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER, NEW YORK, ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2017

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