

chatroom

SEEN & HEARD AT THE DANCE TEACHER SUMMIT

SPOTLIGHT ON KAREN ARCENEUX

It's hard to believe Karen Arceneaux's formal dance training began when she switched her college major from chemistry to earn a BFA in choreographic design. Arceneaux immediately hit the ground running, training at the American Dance Festival, the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and The Ailey School, where she was mentored by internationally recognized master teacher Ana Marie Forsythe. Having spent nearly her entire career as a choreographer, administrator and teacher at Ailey, Arceneaux possesses a deep understanding of the company's aesthetic. Recently, she spoke to *DT* about Horton technique's enduring capacity to inspire. —Helen Rolfe

Dance Teacher: How is Horton technique still relevant in 2017, even to dancers who don't necessarily aspire to join Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater?

Karen Arceneaux: Whether you're training to be a professional dancer or training for the love of dance, Horton strengthens the body and increases flexibility and balance. Horton is a beautiful technique that works with the dancer's natural facility. I have many adults who take my Horton classes through The Ailey Extension program. They tell me my class made them stronger in general and



Arceneaux teaching Horton technique at The Ailey School in New York City

in specific areas: running, belly dance, ballet, hip hop. Some speak of an increase in mobility and decrease in joint stiffness. Others are excited that the class makes them feel like dancers.

DT: You have a lot of experience in substituting for other teachers at the last minute. Any tips for preparing to teach class on the fly?

KA: The more experience you have teaching, the easier it is to jump into last-minute subbing opportunities. After being asked to sub on the spot several times in the beginning of my teaching career, I decided to always be prepared. Because teaching Horton was so new to me, I wrote down the order of class from warm-up to center floor to across the floor and the combination, and studied this outline religiously. Fast-forward 16-plus years, and the order is ingrained. While I do prepare when teaching specific material, I don't spend a lot of time planning. Sometimes I prepare on the train into the city. I love spontaneity and leave room for it. I may have an idea and build on that idea by feeding off the energy of the students and the class level: beginner, intermediate, advanced or mixed. I love creating on the spot—there's never a dull moment.