

ON STAGE

Miami native returns to South Florida with Alvin Ailey dance company



PAUL KOLNIK/CORTESÍA/COURTESY

Jamar Roberts and Constance Stamatiou in Kyle Abraham's "Untitled America," which will be performed in Miami.

Jamar Roberts has thrilled audiences for more than a decade

By **BARBARA CORBELLINI DUARTE**
Staff writer

In his head, Miami native and professional dancer Jamar Roberts is two different people.

One is the private person who lives in New York City. The second is the dancer who has dazzled audiences with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater since 2002.

"I don't really like the idea of being a dancer 24 hours a day. I like having my life separate from my dancer life," says Roberts, 34. "I think the separation helps because it keeps me real. It keeps my dancing honest, and it keeps it sincere."

His dancer self is set to return to South Florida, with Alvin Ailey performances from Feb. 23 to 26 at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in Miami and Feb. 28 at the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts in West Palm Beach.

The Arsht will feature three world premieres: Hope Boykin's "r-Evolution, Dream" is inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermons and speeches; Mauro Bigonzetti's "Deep"

depicts the fusion of European, American and African cultures; and Kyle Abraham's "Untitled America," which portrays the impact of the prison system in black families.

Roberts is particularly excited to perform the latter.

"I think that's really relevant, and he presents it in a way that is really thought-provoking and beautiful and sincere," Roberts says of Abraham's work. "I'm really excited for Miami to see it."

At the Kravis, the shows will be Ronald K. Brown's "Open Door," featuring African and modern dance performed to Latin jazz; Christopher Wheeldon's "After The Rain," an abstract ballet pas de deux; and Rennie Harris' "Exodus," featuring hip-hop danced to gospel and house music.

All performances will close with the Ailey-choreographed 1960 classic, "Revelations."

In addition to the performances, the dance company gives back to the community. It is launching two new scholarships for South Florida students ages 14 to 18 to attend the The Ailey School's Summer Intensive program in New York City. Company dancers also conduct master classes, workshops and small performances with local students at the Arsht Center and at schools.

"We've been trying to deepen our presence here in Miami because this is my home," says

Ailey's artistic director, Robert Battle, who grew up in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami. "I know there's a lot of talent here."

Roberts also gives back to his hometown on his own time. He spent a week in mid-January teaching classes at his former dance school in Kendall, the Dance Empire of Miami.

Student Lexie Hernandez, 10, said taking a class with Roberts was easier than with some of her other teachers because he's less strict.

"Jamar is a really fun person. He walks into the room with a huge smile on his face, and the entire class we just have so much fun. He makes jokes. He makes us laugh, but he also takes his job very seriously," she says.

One of his former dance teachers at the New World School of the Arts, Karen Hirst Kennedy brought her son to take classes with Roberts.

"It comes full circle," she says. "It's really neat."

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will perform Feb. 23-26 at the Adrienne Arsht Center, 1300 Biscayne Blvd., Miami. Tickets start at \$29. Info: 305-949-6722; ArshtCenter.org. The company also will perform Feb. 28 at the Kravis Center, 701 Okeechobee Blvd., West Palm Beach. Tickets start at \$29. Info: 561-832-7469; Kravis.org. bduarte@sunsentinel.com, @babicorb