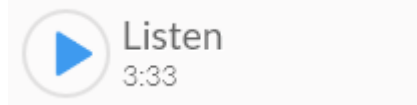




Imagining, Creating And Dancing With Alvin Ailey Dance Instructors

By: Nadege Green

February 22, 2017



Jacoria Adams reads her homework aloud:

“Dream, dream and believe. Dream, believe and dance to the beat.”

Her poem is inspired by Alvin Ailey’s dance, “Night Creature.”

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is well known for its powerful, striking dancers on stage, but each year, as the company tours the U.S., it also uses a dance-inspired curriculum to teach kids.

In Miami, students from the Charles R. Drew K - 8 Center spent a week learning about dance history, poetry and movement with instructors from the dance company.

Jacoria, 10, and four of her classmates teamed up to create dance movements to match the words in her poetry. Ailey instructor Winston Brown helped them put it all together.

Earlier in the week, the students had to read short biographies about Ailey and Duke Ellington to get a better understanding of the dance Night Creature which is set to Ellington’s music.

“Night Creature was choreographed by Alvin Ailey in 1974, which is the same year Duke Ellington died,” said Jamarya Roberts, 11.

And dressed in black leotards and tights, the young dancers also rehearsed excerpts from the dance.

“Dancing is not only moving,” said Nasha Thomas, a former Ailey dancer who taught the week-long intensive at Charles Drew. “It is a discipline that requires focus, concentration, follow through and these are all life skills that the children can use in their everyday lives and their school lives.”

Laniya Eiland, 9, said one of her favorite things has been learning about jazz.

“Alvin Ailey said the music has a connection with the movements so with me doing the movements I can embrace myself,” she said.

Renee Robinson, danced with the Ailey company for 31 years and as she looked at the young students at Charles Drew giggling and mirroring steps she once performed, she said this was always Alvin Ailey’s vision.

“Going off of Mr. Ailey’s words, ‘Dance comes from the people and it should always be delivered back to the people,’” said Robinson.

Imagination is a central theme in the company’s “Night Creature” school curriculum. That’s why the students don’t just learn Ailey’s choreography, they’re encouraged to create their own.

“They have a chance to see themselves through this experience,” said Robinson.

During class, Laniya said she saw how dance movements from the past can be mixed in with newer dance styles that she knows.

The young dancers rehearsed a piece that was created entirely by them with each student contributing their own movement.

They added a lyrical port-de-bras, box steps and some of the latest social dances like juju on that beat and dabbing.

“We can add our new school into the old school from back then,” said Laniya. “We can make a whole new [dance] story for 2017.”

If You Go:

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the Adrienne Arsht Center

Thursday, Feb 23, -Sunday, Feb 26

See the full schedule at arshtcenter.org

Listen here:

<http://wlrn.org/post/imagining-creating-and-dancing-alvin-ailey-dance-instructors>