Ailey Extension Dance Classes: Release your inner dancer

Alley Barre class at the Alley Extension.

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Have you ever seen in the audience at an Alvin Alley American Dance Theater performance during the magnificent dance company’s summer and winter seasons and thought wistfully, “I would love to try to do at least some of that?” We’ll, nothing’s impossible. The folks at the Alvin Alley American Dance Theater want everyone to know that dance is not a spectator sport. Just as the world-renowned dance company’s performances are open to anyone and everyone, so, too, are classes offered at the company’s midtown Manhattan headquarters at 56th Street and Ninth Avenue.

Inspired by the vision of the late Alvin Alley, today the Alley organization offers a range of programs and classes that include training for professional and professional training classes, the academic Alley Fordham BFAs program and Alley Camp, among others. But, not to be forgotten is that unique movement called the Alley Extension that offers some 80 classes a week in more than 25 different dance and fitness techniques in the AADT’s spacious, well-equipped studios. On the Alley website the extension is described simply as “Real Classes for Real People.”

Alley, the magnificent master of modern dance, believed it was his organization’s mission to return dance to the very people who inspired it. At the Alley Extension that means making all kinds of dance classes or fitness classes available to anyone from 16-year-olds to 60-year-olds who come through the door. According to Alley Extension Director Lisa Johnson-Willingham, “Our mission is to bring dance to the people and we believe that everybody has an inner dancer just dying to get out.” In that end, the Alley Extension serves up a smorgasbord of movement, dance and fitness classes for everyone from absolute beginners to more advanced movers and shakers of all shapes and sizes. All anyone has to do is register at the front desk in the lobby, dress in street clothes in the bright, clean locker-lined dressing rooms (which has showers for those after-class showers), slip on practice gear and dash off to the studio, prepared to move and be moved.

The hardest thing one has to do is choose from the extraordinary range of classes. There is Afro-Caribbean, ballet, contemporary, jazz/teater, capoeira, hip-hop, dance fitness/cardio, Pilates/leather/spot/cheer, tap, salsa,umba/African-Brasian, salsa, West African and yoga.

In Horton, the modern dance technique that bears the name of Alvin Alley’s late teacher and mentor, the codified exercises, isolations and movement patterns and progressions across the floor improve one’s range of motion. Pilates and yoga classes gently increase flexibility, strengthen the core and extend the range of motion while releasing muscle tension. West African dance is a joy-filled, high-powered rhythmic experience accompanied by live drummers. Ballet classes evoke the beauty and grace of a Misty Copeland as adult students of all levels learn everything from absolute beginner to more advanced aspects of a technique that focuses on proper alignment, balance and flexibility. Tap, that familiar heart of rhythmic Broadway in which tap shoes turn the dance floor into a percussive instrument, recreates the magic of such masters as Gregory Hines, Honey Cole and other legend Salsa, samba, Afro-Brazilian and a wealth of other dance forms teach students to move comfortably and confidently to Latin rhythms, transitioning into fundamental, sexy styles incorporat...