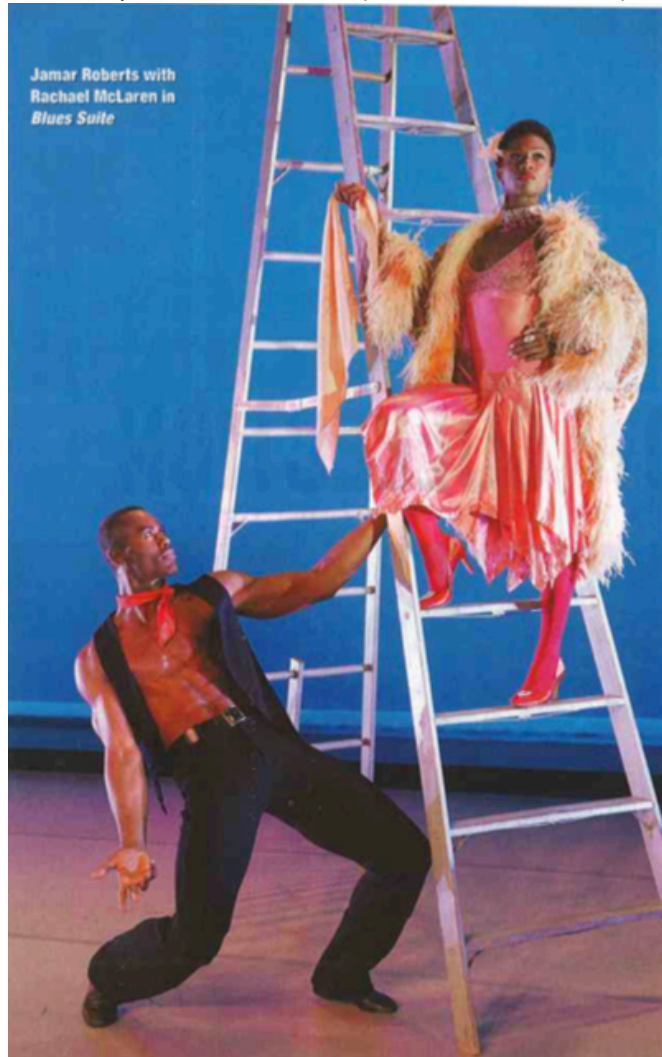


Jamar Roberts, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

September 14, 2017 (October 2017 Issue)



Jamar Roberts with
Rachael McLaren in
Blues Suite

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DREAM ROLE: "Backwater Blues," from Alvin Ailey's *Blues Suite*

I never had a dream role until I first joined AAADT and saw Renee Robinson and Amos J. Machanic Jr. dance "Backwater Blues," this amazing duet. I thought, "Wow! It would be great if I ever got to do that!"

And I did get to do it two years ago, with one of my best friends, Rachael McLaren. We're practically brother and sister, and she really helped me bring my character to life. We rarely get to dance together because of our height difference, so the rehearsal process was basically us laughing the whole time. I couldn't have asked for a better partner.

I learned the work in about two weeks, but I'd been watching it for years and years, so I kind of knew the steps already. There aren't a lot of technical stunts; it's more about two characters and human experience. The choreography is flirtatious and fun, but the couple is clearly having a fight. I expected there to be more time between steps and comedic moments. It's tricky to portray anger in just eight counts! Our associate artistic director, Masazumi Chaya, gave us a lot of freedom to interpret the choreography our own way.

There are probably things I'm better at dancing, but this role felt so good to me. I threw myself into it, instead of pacing myself, like I usually would with a long ballet. I was so excited to just give everything.