

# ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

## *Mass*

(2004 / Company Premiere 2017)

*Choreography:* Robert Battle

*Assistant to the Choreographer:* Elisa Clark

*Music:* John Mackey

*Costumes:* Fritz Masten

*Lighting:* Burke Wilmore

Artistic Director Robert Battle's *Mass* features a score by John Mackey, with whom he most recently collaborated with on 2015's *Awakening*. The work features 16 dancers showcasing Mr. Battle's signature ritualistic choreography, and the Lincoln Center performances include six live percussionists onstage.

"The genesis of this work came to me while seeing Verdi's Requiem at Carnegie Hall," explains Robert Battle. "I found myself utterly absorbed in the intricacies of how the choir moved as a unit and then organized and condensed themselves in the pews. The juxtaposition of the choir themselves constrained by space while their voices traveled through the hall was fascinating. I began creating the movement you will see in *Mass* by deconstructing the chorus. I wanted an original score and was familiar with John Mackey from previous works I had created, making him a clear choice for the composer."

The ballet was originally created for a "New Dances" program at The Juilliard School in November 2004. *The New York Times'* review of the performance declared: "Mr. Battle, the youngest choreographer, has recently made a name for himself with original rapid-fire movement and unexpected imagery. The Juilliard Percussion Ensemble, at the rear of the stage, provided the sound, growing in intensity. Mr. Battle took the senior class along the same path. The dancers scooted around, huddled and worked themselves up wonderfully into astounding vigor. The ritual ended with the leader throwing himself to the floor and a group flying out into the wings."

### **Robert Battle**

Robert Battle became artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in July 2011 after being selected by Judith Jamison, making him only the third person to head the Company since it was founded in 1958. A frequent choreographer and artist-in-residence at Ailey since 1999, he has set many of his works on Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II, and at The Ailey School. The Company's current repertory includes his ballets *The Hunt*, *In/Side*, *Strange Humors*, *Takademe*, and *No Longer Silent*. In addition to expanding the Ailey repertory with works by artists as diverse as Kyle Abraham, Aszure Barton, Ronald K. Brown, Garth Fagan, Bill T. Jones, Jiří Kylián, Wayne McGregor, Robert Moses, Ohad Naharin, and Paul Taylor, he has also instituted the New Directions Choreography Lab to help nurture the next generation of choreographers. Mr. Battle is committed to using the arts as a vehicle for change and education. In 2015, he introduced *No Longer Silent*, set to a score that was banned by the Nazis, and premiered on the Ailey Company in conjunction with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Holocaust. *Awakening* is the ninth work by Mr. Battle to enter the Ailey repertory. Mr. Battle studied at Miami's New World School of the Arts and attended The Juilliard School on scholarship. He danced with the Parsons Dance Company from 1994 to 2001, setting choreography on that company before founding Battleworks Dance Company. Battleworks debuted in 2002 in Düsseldorf, Germany, as the U.S. representative to the World Dance Alliance's Global Assembly. Battleworks subsequently performed at venues around the globe and in the U.S., including The Joyce Theater, Dance Theater Workshop, American Dance Festival, and Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. Mr. Battle was honored as one of the "Masters of African-American Choreography" by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2005, and he received the prestigious Statue Award from the Princess Grace



Robert Battle.  
Photo by Andrew Eccles.

Foundation-USA in 2007. In 2014, he received an honorary doctorate from The University of the Arts. Most recently, Mr. Battle was named a 2015 Visiting Fellow for The Art of Change, an initiative by the Ford Foundation.

### **John Mackey**

John Mackey (born October 1, 1973) is an American composer, with a focus on classical music for wind band and orchestra. Raised in Westerville, Ohio, Mackey was introduced at a young age to computer music notation and began composing his own music using the technology, though he never formally studied an instrument. After receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1995, he moved to New York City where he received a Master of Music degree from Julliard in 1997. While living in New York, Mackey developed a passion for creating music for modern dance and ballet, collaborating with choreographers such as Robert Battle, David Parsons, Doug Varone, and Igal Perry. And from 1999 to 2003, he served as the Music Director of Parsons Dance Company. Mackey has held residencies at colleges and universities throughout the United States, and his music has been performed all over the world – including at the 2004 Athens Olympics, when the U.S. Olympic Synchronized Swim Team performed to his score “Damn.” A two-time recipient of the ABA/Ostwald Prize (“Redline Tango,” 2005; “Aurora Awakes,” 2009), Mackey currently resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The three-part “Wine Dark Sea: Symphony for Band” is his first symphony.

### ***Mass***

#### Music Credit Information

Music:

**“Mass”**

Composed by: John Mackey