

# ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

## *Mass* (2004 / Ailey Company Premiere – 2017)

*Choreography:* Robert Battle

*Restaged by:* 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 on 2015's *Awakening*. The work features 16 dancers showcasing Mr. Battle's signature ritualistic choreography.

"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."

"... for 16 dancers to an earnest score by John Mackey. **Intense, serious, it shows the architectural skill** with which Mr. Battle contrasts groups as well as individuals. I find it **effective...**"

*The New York Times*



AAADT in Robert Battle's *Mass*.  
Photo by Paul Kolnik.



Artistic Director Robert Battle. Photo by Andrew Eccles.

### **Robert Battle**

Robert Battle became artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in July 2011 after being personally selected by Judith Jamison, making him only the third person to head the Company since it was founded in 1958. Mr. Battle has a long-standing association with the Ailey organization.

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 *Ella*, *The Hunt*, *In/Side*, *No Longer Silent*, and *Mass* – a 2017 Company premiere. In addition to expanding the Ailey repertory with works by artists as diverse as Kyle Abraham, Aszure Barton, Ronald K. Brown, Christopher Wheeldon, Rennie Harris, Hofesh Schechter, Jiří Kylián, Wayne McGregor, Robert Moses, Ohad Naharin, and Paul Taylor, Mr. Battle has also instituted the New Directions Choreography Lab to help develop the next generation of choreographers.

Mr. Battle's journey to the top of the modern dance world began in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami, Florida. He showed artistic talent early and studied dance at a high school arts magnet program before moving on to Miami's New World School of the Arts, under the direction of Daniel Lewis and Gerri Houlihan, and finally to the dance program at The Juilliard School, under the direction of Benjamin Harkarvy, where he met his mentor, Carolyn Adams. He danced with the Parsons Dance Company from 1994 to 2001, and also set his choreography on the company starting in 1998. Mr. Battle then founded his own Battleworks Dance Company, which made its debut in 2002 in Düsseldorf, Germany, as the U.S. representative to the World Dance Alliance's Global Assembly. Battleworks subsequently performed extensively at venues 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 Foundation-USA in 2007. In 2014, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of the Arts and visited the White House to accept from President Obama, on behalf of Alvin Ailey, the National Medal of Freedom – the nation's highest civilian honor. Mr. Battle was named a 2015 Visiting Fellow for The Art of Change, an initiative by the Ford Foundation. In October 2015, Simon & Schuster published *MY STORY, MY DANCE: Robert Battle's Journey to Alvin Ailey*, an inspiring children's book based on Mr. Battle's life. He is a sought-after keynote speaker and has addressed a number of high-profile organizations, including the United Nations Leaders Programme and the UNICEF Senior Leadership Development Programme.

### **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 Juilliard 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.



John Mackey. Photo courtesy of Osti Music.

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**

Song: "Mass"

Composed by: John Mackey