



# Charlottean's homecoming dance with Alvin Ailey

By Ashley Mahoney

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Jacquelin Harris is telling her story through dance.

Harris, a Charlotte native, joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 2014, and comes home for their Belk Theater performances Feb. 27-28.

"My ballet teacher, Denise Britz-Clarke, took us on an outing to see Charlotte Ballet's production of 'Romeo and Juliet,'" Harris said. "That was my first real experience with a concert—at the Blumenthal actually—and I fell in love. We were sitting in the mezzanine. The story was so dark, but it was so beautiful. The dancers were so graceful. I was like 'dance is for me. You can tell any story through dance, and that's exactly what I want to do.' That's what we try to do here—share our own personal stories. One thing that resonated with me when I saw the company first perform in New York City, I saw them perform 'Revelations.'"

Harris grew up near W.T. Harris Boulevard, performing with Dance Productions.

"I can tell a story with my body the same way I saw these dancers at the Charlotte Ballet telling their stories with their bodies so long ago," Harris said.

While Ailey died in 1989, 31 years after the company's first performance, his legacy lives on in dancers like Harris.

"It's American history," Harris said. "It's not just dance. It's not just art. It's the history of the African American culture, and that's something we get to share all over the world."

Ailey was more than a choreographer, he was an activist. The company continues to touch on timely issues from addiction to mass incarceration through dance.

"A lot of what we're presenting this season touches on history, culture, legacy and sharing the story, and making sure the people who come to see us dance walk away with a sense of history, and a sense of everything that has come before us, and everything that we are trying to share to make sure that it thrives in the future."

Not only do the dancers perform, they provide master classes for young students—one of Harris' favorite elements.

"We do a lot of outreach with the different schools in the community," Harris said. "That's something that affects me the most about working with this company is being able to go into the community and teach the children who live in the different areas of the world, and see how every single time, they respond to movement. Every single time, they respond to the story of Mr. Ailey. He knew that movement could change lives, and that dance comes from the people, and that it should be given back to the people, because that's how you make a difference. I get to witness how these children are responding through dance, the same way that I did."

*For more information about the performance:*

[www.blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater](http://www.blumenthalarts.org/events/detail/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater)

*Information about the company:*

[www.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/jacquelin-harris](http://www.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/jacquelin-harris)

*Information about the Ailey Experience at Northwest School of the Arts Feb. 24-25:*

[www.aileyextension.com/ailey-experience-tour](http://www.aileyextension.com/ailey-experience-tour)