

# THE BLADE

March 1, 2018

THE BLADE



PEACH

# weekender



Rocking  
out with  
Acoustics for  
Autism  
— PAGE 18

THURSDAY | MARCH 1, 2018

INSIDE | CLUBS | MUSIC | MOVIES | FOOD | TELEVISION | SPORTS AND MORE



# Poetry in motion

Ailey II explores the nexus of classical and contemporary dance — Page 3



# Power of dance

Ailey II explores bond between ballet, contemporary



**IF YOU GO**

**What:** Ailey II Dance Company

**When:** 8 p.m. Friday

**Where:** Valentine Theatre, 400 N. Superior St.

**Tickets:** \$29-\$59; \$10 student rush tickets 30 minutes before curtain

**Information:** 419-242-2787 or [valentinetheatre.com](http://valentinetheatre.com)

**By MIKE PEARSON**  
BLADE FEATURES EDITOR

**W**hen Troy Powell talks about the power of dance, you can almost see his face light up 600 miles away in Red Wing, Minn., where the Ailey II dance company is performing a week before arriving in Toledo.

"We are all dancers in our own right," the artistic director says with the zeal of a missionary. "When I say dancing, I mean everyone is born to move. Everyone's born with a rhythm, that heartbeat or tone."

The rhythm of Powell's own career has taken him from the New York High School of the Performing Arts, to the celebrated Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, first as a performer and later a choreographer. Today he shepherds Ailey II to various smaller American cities, but his career also includes work with the Alaska Dance Theater, the National Dance Company of the Bahamas, *PBS' Great Performances* and the Polish version of *So You Think You can Dance*.

He's even choreographed three episodes of *Sesame Street*.

At every stop he and his performers carry a simple message: Dance is endemic to the human condition, the only difference being the degree of polish that makes one a professional.

"It's a universal language, like movement period," he says. "I always relate dance to sports. I love sports, and I think dance is just a more poetic way of expressing yourself."

Like its parent company, Ailey II was formed to explore the nexus between ballet and contemporary styles. But its larger purpose is as a training ground for the company's next generation of dancers, and to see whether they have the stamina and talent to graduate to Dance Theater proper.

The current troupe consist of 12 dancers, with Toledo being the second to last stop on a 32-city tour that began in September and included detours earlier this year to France and Spain.

The Toledo show will feature two of three new works commissioned by the Ailey organization in 2017: *Breaking Point* by Jamaican-born Renee I. McDonald, and Darrell Grand Moultrie's *Road to One*. The former depicts "the fight for our heart's desire," according to press materials, while the latter explores the "search for meaning in life."

Contemporary dance being a catch-all phrase, one wonders how the artistic director



**Powell**

Ailey II in Renee McDonald's 'Breaking Point.'

PHOTO BY JUDY ONDREY

See **DANCE**, Page W12



# Dance

Continued from W3

defines modern dance.

"Ailey is known for a specific technique [rooted in] ballet, but we're a modern dance company, which means a fusion of different types of styles. What Mr. Ailey did was fuse all these different styles into his repertoire."

Beyond simply performing, Powell and company consider themselves ambassadors for dance.

"We go into classrooms with lecture demonstrations and mini performances where young students get the opportunity to learn what it's like becoming a dancer, that when the curtain opens it's because of the process, not because it's magic."

He says such educational forays are especially important in this digital age.

"What's different about this generation is that our [earlier] choreographers and teachers were more hands on. These days it's all technology and TV. When we did our research [back in the day], we would have to go to live concerts, we



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## Ailey II in Darrell Grand Moultrie's 'Road to One'

would have to watch rehearsal. Today you can just go to YouTube or any site and watch dance and it's just not the same as being part of a live concert or rehearsal."

While Ailey II travels with 10 works in its repertoire, the dancers perform only three or four at each stop given their lengths of 20-minutes plus. The third piece at the Toledo show is *Revelations*, Alvin Ailey's best-known work, a vibrant exploration of the African diaspora in America.

How does Powell account for the continued popularity of a piece that premiered in

1960?

"When he created the work he was ahead of his time," he explains. "He wanted to create a movement that celebrated his African American heritage and the modern dance tradition. No matter what color you were or what age you were or what you believed in, he wanted you to celebrate that and change your perspective, not just on Ailey or dance, but on life. At some point, anyone sitting the audience can relate to what *Revelations* is."

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