

Choreographer Jessica Lang on “EN,” a world premiere for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

By: Serena S.Y. Hsu

June 13, 2018



Memories, spirituality, and love encircle Choreographer Jessica Lang’s EN, a Japanese word meaning fate, karma, and destiny. In her interview with the Dance Enthusiast, Lang highlights EN as a journey celebrating her husband, Kanji Segawa, and her intimate connection with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Jessica Lang: EN is both my 100th ballet and my first piece for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which makes it both a homecoming and a homage to a wonderful company that brought Kanji and I together.

Kanji Segawa: EN’s concept comes from Jessica and my personal story, but it is [also] a mutual message to everyone — universal power is beautiful to feel and live in.

Jessica Lang: Between us, Kanji and I share 20 years full of hope and love and perseverance in careers which are not easy to succeed in. Kanji is my associate, my assistant in all my creations.

Kanji first came to the U.S. through a Japanese government grant to study at Ailey School; my first choreographed ballet (1997) was with Glenn Sims, who would soon become a renowned principal dancer with AADT.



1997 was also the year when Kanji and I first met. Twyla Tharp’s company had folded so I was available for a three-month gig, and Kanji was on a summer break from Ailey School, which is how we got to dance together for Igal Perry. I fell in love with Kanji’s sweetness, and it was his dancing and artistry which drew us together.

After his Ailey II apprenticeship, Kanji worked as a dancer for Robert Battle at Battleworks, then for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater after Battle became its artistic director.

Jessica Lang: Music was another ‘circle’ between Kanji and I. Music theory [at Julliard] was extremely beneficial for me in presenting the dramatic art of dance. Our closest friendships are with my Julliard friends — we share curiosity, the quest for knowledge, trust. Battle and Sims — we are all alumni. Battle was our honored speaker at our wedding in 2007.

‘EN’ represents how destiny binds time, people and relationships in so many interesting and marvelous ways. We may not initially know why or how, but we continue to discover that our paths are intrinsically connected. . .

Lang: I approach dance much like a designer will adapt to an interior’s style and colors. My vocabulary is defined by the dancer in the room and tailored to what they are gifted to do. Everything is balanced and nuanced to their bodies, their language of expression.

Jessica Lang is Artistic Director of Jessica Lang Dance, formed in 2011. A critically acclaimed and visionary choreographer, she has created diverse works for national and international companies such as American Ballet Theater, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Joffrey Ballet, National Ballet of Japan, Jacob’s Pillow, and John F. Kennedy Center. She is a 2014 Bessie Award and 2017 Arison Award winner.

