

## Augusta native to make Atlanta debut

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February 18, 2019

### AJC PERFORMING ARTS

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

# Augusta native to make Atlanta dancing debut

Company to premiere two-act, hip-hop ballet 'Lazarus' at Fox Theatre.

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Christopher Wilson was 11 years old when he sat mesmerized at the Fox Theatre watching a performance of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Today, some 12 years later, he's come full circle.

Wilson, an Augusta native, will once again be at the Fox, this time, though, on stage as a full member of the storied dance troupe, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

"I saw superheroes on stage who looked like me," said Wilson in a telephone interview from Miami, where the company was performing. "It was overwhelming. I'd seen dance performances before, but they were more classical dance and there were not too many people of color in classical dance."

Wilson will make his Atlanta debut with the company Thursday in "Revelations" and the world premiere of "Lazarus," a piece created by hip-hop choreographer Rennie Harris. The hour-long performance is the first two-act ballet in Ailey history.

The powerful piece is inspired by Ailey's life and addresses issues of racism from 1958, when the company was founded, through today. Ailey died in 1989.

The performances run through Sunday night and will feature the work "Members Don't Get Weary,"

### DANCE PREVIEW

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

8 p.m. Thursday-Friday; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday; 3 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday. \$29-\$89. Fox Theatre, 660 Peachtree St. NE, Atlanta. 404-881-2100, foxtheatre.org.

created by Jamar Roberts to the music of John Coltrane.

"Lazarus" is Wilson's favorite work.

"What he (Harris) does in the hour span is amazing," Wilson said. "He kind of takes you down this rabbit hole and because of your emotions it can be a little bit triggering. He really takes you there."

In the audience will be his mother, Sabrina Washington, an Augusta educator, as well as nearly 40 friends and relatives.

"Augusta will be well-represented in the building," he said, a bit of delight creeping into his voice.

Wilson became interested in dance when he was 9 years old and attended a summer arts program. One day he was in dance class and caught the eye of fellow Augusta native Russell Joel Brown, a Broadway actor and Morehouse graduate.

Brown told Wilson's mother that he should seriously consider pursuing dance. "I guess he saw some potential there and my mom and I just went with it,"

Dance continued on D2



Augusta native Christopher Wilson will perform with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, whose shows will be Thursday-Sunday at the Fox Theatre. CONTRIBUTED BY KYLE FROMAN

## Dance

continued from D1

Wilson said. Brown was so impressed that he gave Wilson a scholarship for a local dance class.

As a young black male interested in dance, Wilson got his share of ribbing.

At the time, Wilson was also playing basketball and taking golf and cello lessons. The lessons were costly, though. Finally, his mother pushed him to make a choice. He still played the cello for a while, but dance was the clear winner.

"It's weird to describe but dancing felt good," said Wilson, who moved to New York at 18. "It feels like a cliché, but when I'm dancing, the world stops and I'm just in the moment. It's something I love, and I get to do it as my job."

Wilson studied at the Colton Ballet School, Alonzo King LINES Ballet and The School at Jacob's Pillow. He began his professional career with BHDos, the second company of Ballet Hispanico, and has performed at the World Monuments Fund's Hadrian Gala honoring Queen Sofia of Spain. He was also a member of Ailey II.

Wilson became a full mem-



Christopher Wilson, an Augusta native, will perform during the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's run at the Fox Theatre.

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ber of Alvin Ailey last April, after two previous attempts.

This time, though, Wilson said, he was better prepared emotionally and physically for the grueling, hours-long auditions.

He had an ace in the hole, though.

"Physically, I had a better understanding of my body. After two years with Ailey II, I had learned how to take care of my body and listen to it," he said. "Naturally, I was more mature and had grown artistically. I found

my own voice in my dancing. I brought all of that to the audition. When a director looks at you, they want to see you. You have to be able to do the choreography, but at the end of the day, you are on the stage and you have to show yourself."

"It was a shocker," he said about being selected.

Matthew Rushing, Ailey's rehearsal director, called Wilson "extremely versatile. He possesses a good balance of confidence, integrity and humility, and he's malleable, which is very important for a young artist."

At 23, Wilson is part of the younger group of Ailey dancers.

Rushing, who has known Wilson for years, admires his focus and passion. "He's always growing."

Wilson was recently in Atlanta to teach a master class to Atlanta students.

It's easier now for a young African-American male to study dance. "Young men are my target audience," he said. "They are who I do this for. A lot of them may not know this, but they can go all the way. I want them to see that they can be on stage and have all of their wildest dreams come true. It's not impossible. It's very possible."