

THE OBSERVER

Fordham/Ailey BFAs Go Out With a Bang (And a Battement)

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Running five blocks in five minutes, studying flashcards at the ballet barre or learning the Horton fortifications might sound all too familiar for students in the Fordham/Ailey B.F.A. program. The graduating class of 2019 spent eight semesters in a unique program that blends both academic rigor and artistic development as a dancer.

Siobhan Murray, Fordham College at Lincoln Center (FCLC) '19, articulated how the program has shaped her. "It's taught me so much about myself and the kind of dancer and person that I want to be. I've learned that you really have to forge your own path and put yourself in situations that may be out of your comfort zone in order to grow."

April 8 marked the start of an exciting week for all students at The Ailey School, but a bittersweet one for the senior class. Senior Week began with three Senior Solo Concerts, each featuring around 10 of the Fordham/Ailey seniors. On the last two days, the class of 2019 performed ensemble pieces at the Senior Concert. Following the Friday performance, a reception was held at Ailey, inviting teachers and friends to celebrate the success of the seniors.

Monday's Senior Solo Concert featured 11 seniors, including Amanda Egan, and Murray. Closing out the show, Egan performed a work by esteemed choreographer Paul Taylor titled "Runes." Although Taylor passed away last August — a tragic loss in the concert dance industry — Egan shared a hopeful outlook on how art can keep his legacy alive.

"I think one of the most beautiful things about dance is how it connects us over generations," Egan said. "Although I never met Paul Taylor, I feel like I got to meet him through his work and in a small way honor his legacy by performing this solo."

Murray performed a piece choreographed by Nijawwon Matthews, an emotional narrative of her journey with self-trust. "This solo was very personal to me, but I think it's something everyone can connect to in some way," Murray explained. "Learning to love yourself and acknowledging your power as an individual is an ongoing process, but we can all get there. We have so much more to offer than we think."

As for the future, the B.F.A. program provides students with a strong foundation of technique, allowing seniors to explore a variety of styles in the professional world. Some will pursue a career on Broadway, infusing singing and acting with their passion for dance. Others may choose to follow the traditional route, auditioning for professional companies. "I plan on auditioning for New York-based dance companies like Paul Taylor, Graham, Limon or Mark Morris," Egan said.

Despite the intimidating names of these world-renowned companies, the Fordham/Ailey alumni network serves as a community within the sometimes overwhelming dance industry. Murray hopes to stay in contact with her classmates: "My classmates have served as endless inspiration the past four years and I only hope that our paths continue to cross, because they've all changed my life in some way!"

Most people fear the future and the unknown, but some members of the graduating class of 2019 do not. "I'm looking forward to discovering myself as an artist outside the structure of school," Murray said.

Egan agreed, "I am excited for all that lies ahead!"

Sitting in the audience watching the senior solos displayed the product of four years spent pushing past both physical and mental limitations. Four years of classes molded the dancers' bodies into instruments for their art, classes spent expanding their perspective of the world. Each dancer had a different approach to their movement, whether it was jazz or en pointe, but they all displayed a sense of gratitude in their performances.

With this gratitude beaming from their bodies, the seniors took one final bow on stage, thanking themselves, the audience and The Ailey School for the experience of a lifetime.