

VOGUE

The Alvin Ailey School Celebrates 50 Years With a Moving Gala Performance

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Alvin Ailey is a name synonymous with both world-class ballet and the black American experience. Ailey founded his dance company in 1958 to showcase the best black talent, and, in 1969, a school of dance. And last night, the company celebrated its school's 50th anniversary, at Lincoln Center.



The night saw a premiere by Troy Powell, a dancer and choreographer who has enjoyed a long history with the dance troupe. When he was 9 years old, Powell was scouted by Ailey himself. Soon after, Powell was awarded a scholarship to the Ailey School and migrated up the ranks of Ailey's programs. Today, he serves as the artistic director of Ailey's second company, Ailey II. "He was like a lifesaver," Powell says of Ailey, who acted as the father figure Powell was lacking. "He gave me these two feet that I'm standing on."



As a part of the Ailey Spirit Gala, an annual celebration raising funds for scholarships like the one Powell received, Powell choreographed *Testimony*, a dynamic autobiographical ballet chronicling a young boy's journey from the schoolyard to the stage. It incorporated Ailey dancers of all ages, beginning with pint-size boys and girls. The main character conveys a break from traditional masculinity and an entrance into the world of dance. The show, while immediately gratifying, got stronger as the dancers did and represented a generation of performers coming into their power. At one point, you could hear the whisk of arms cutting through the air as bodies pulled and pulsed. *Testimony* was billed as exclusive to the gala—it would be a shame if that stayed true.



Testimony was followed by *Lazarus*, a thumping modern romp complete with Milly rocks and set to gospel house music. *Lazarus* was followed by *Revelations*, Ailey's iconic ballet of spiritual longing, first performed in 1960. "This is the most spirited I've seen it," said one 40-year patron. And *Revelations* was followed by an all-out party, where DJ M.O.S. spun through the decades, from Bobby Brown's "Don't Be Cruel" to Drake's "Nice for What." TK Wonder was one of the first to christen the floor, but soon after, guests were dancing on chairs and swag-surfing with Ailey dancers, raising more than \$1 million to support the next crop of stars.

Kehinde Wiley, the acclaimed painter known for his regal re-creations of everyday black folk (and who was commissioned to paint Barack Obama's Smithsonian portrait), was both festive and pensive. "What we really

see here is the power of manifesting—putting something out there, whether it be our young people or our intentions,” he said, reflecting on the Ailey School’s 50th anniversary and the celebration around it. “What we’re seeing is what our ancestors have done for centuries, which is to put their dreams out there and hope that they will be fertilized and cared for by a future generation.”

