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Associate Director To Step Down at Ailey

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Masazumi Chaya (right), the associate artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater since 1991, will retire on Jan. 5 after the company's annual City Center season. But he'll still be involved with the organization: After he steps down, Chaya, 72, will be in charge of a licensing project that will assist in the restaging of Ailey's works.

Matthew Rushing, a veteran dancer and the company's rehearsal director, will take over as associate artistic director, while Ronni Favors, a former Ailey member, will become the company's rehearsal director. Clifton Brown, a current dancer, will join Linda Celeste Sims as an assistant to the rehearsal director.

Chaya is a former dancer with the company, which he joined in 1972. He has devoted his life to Ailey's legacy, both in preserving repertory and in training generations of dancers.

He is confident about the succession. "Every time somebody asked me, 'Are you ready?'; I was not quite ready — and not because of what I'm doing," he said. "I enjoy it, but I was not sure if I had a group of people that could continue. I think these young people should have this opportunity to enjoy my job. I felt it shouldn't be just mine."

When Robert Battle, the company's artistic director, took over in 2011, Chaya planned on staying for three more years. "I can remember the first couple of times he would come to me and say, 'So, we have to start thinking about next year' and I literally would sort of ignore him," Battle said, with a laugh. "I'd make sounds like, 'Mmmm.' But it's time."

Battle considered his dedication over the years. "I've had a front-row seat to his love of Alvin Ailey, the man, and that sense that he told him to take care of his ballets and his company," he said. "It's in his being, so I can't imagine he'll ever be that far away."

He described naming Rushing as associate artistic director as a "no brainer" and referred to him as a "grounding force."

"He's a sounding board, and there's also his knowledge of the



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repertory," he continued. "Because I didn't dance for the company, Chaya, and, now, Matthew, are my arms and legs in a way. The repertory that I never physically experienced informs everything we do."

A special program on Dec. 22, during the City Center season, will pay tribute to Chaya's contributions. For Battle, aside from Chaya's deep knowledge and history, what he will miss most is his humor.

"No matter what we're going through, no matter what's happening — and he was with Alvin when Alvin was going through

the worst time and facing his own demise — he's not easily rattled," Battle said. "He will always find some way to break

the tension with something funny. He just keeps moving forward."

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