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Ailey Selects Resident Choreographer

By: Peter Libbey

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Jamar Roberts is a veteran of the company.

By PETER LIBBEY

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater announced Thursday that Jamar Roberts will be the company's first resident choreographer. Mr. Roberts, a veteran company member, will begin his tenure with "Ode," an examination of the value of life in an era of pervasive gun violence. The work for six dancers will debut on Dec. 10 as a part of Ailey's five-week season at New York City Center.

Mr. Roberts did a widely acclaimed piece, "Members Don't

Get Weary," for Ailey, in 2017.

"All of the sudden you make a great piece and everybody wants you," Robert Battle, the troupe's artistic director, said in an interview. "Then you have to start to reinvent that same piece because sometimes you're being asked to do that."

As an in-house choreographer, Mr. Roberts will have the opportunity "to continue to investigate his voice," Mr. Battle said.

In addition to choreographing "Ode," the first of a planned three-part series of dances, Mr. Roberts will design the costumes.

Donald Byrd's "Greenwood," his fifth work for Ailey, shares Mr.

Roberts's political focus. The ensemble piece, to debut on Dec. 6, is inspired by the 1921 Tulsa Riots, in which white residents terrorized their black neighbors. "As we've just celebrated our 60th anniversary, we're looking at ways Alvin Ailey used his voice as a weapon for change," Mr. Battle said.

The season will also mark a departure. Masazumi Chaya, whose retirement as the company's associate artistic director was announced in July, will be celebrated with a tribute performance on Dec. 22. The program, which will include a piece d'occasion by Matthew Rushing — who is taking on Mr. Chaya's old job — will hon-

or Mr. Chaya's nearly five-decade career at Ailey as an "untiring and unmatched keeper of the flame" of the company's legacy.

Audiences will also have the opportunity to see several works that had their debuts during Ailey's 2018-19 season, including Rennie Harris's "Lazarus" and Jessica Lang's "EN." And a new production of Judith Jamison's "Divining" (1984), her first choreographic effort, which skillfully combines African dance forms and modernist choreography.

Tickets for Ailey's City Center season will go on sale Sept. 9. For the full lineup and more information visit alvinailey.org.