

DANCESPIRIT

Jamar Roberts Writes a Letter to His Teenage Self

By: Jamar Roberts

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Jamar Roberts is an Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater icon. He's danced with the company for more than 15 years, and at 6' 4", he cuts a powerful and immediately recognizable figure onstage. As a choreographer, he is prolific, passionate, and political—his most recent, instantly iconic piece for Ailey, *Ode*, is a meditation on the fragility of life in the age of gun violence. Though several of Roberts' planned premieres have been postponed because of the COVID-19 outbreak, we can't wait to see his works performed again. —Cadence Neenan

Hello, young man,

First, I would like to say that I commend you for being smart enough to build all those walls around your little heart, to protect you from the pain and shame of all that you have endured. Just know that the walls cannot stay there forever. When you are older, I ask that you do your best to gently, gently, start working at bringing them down. It will be essential to your overall health, and will assist you in experiencing life and love more fully.

I know that you have felt the bitter sting of abandonment from the ones you love, but do not let your heart grow callous, do not be afraid to let your heart love the things that it loves. That includes dance. Dance is your gift. Use it as a way to heal, or at least as a way to feel good! As long as you do, it will not abandon you.

The power of dance is so much bigger than that of the dancer. It is a divine act of generosity, and it's what you have to contribute to making the world a better place. No matter the wreckage, persist, persist, persist. I promise you that the hard work will pay off.



Continue to quietly observe the world. Know that your silence is golden, not awkward. One day you will create worlds of your own that will act as mirrors, reflecting the beauty of humanity back onto itself. Keep your heart and eyes open.

Love,

Jamar