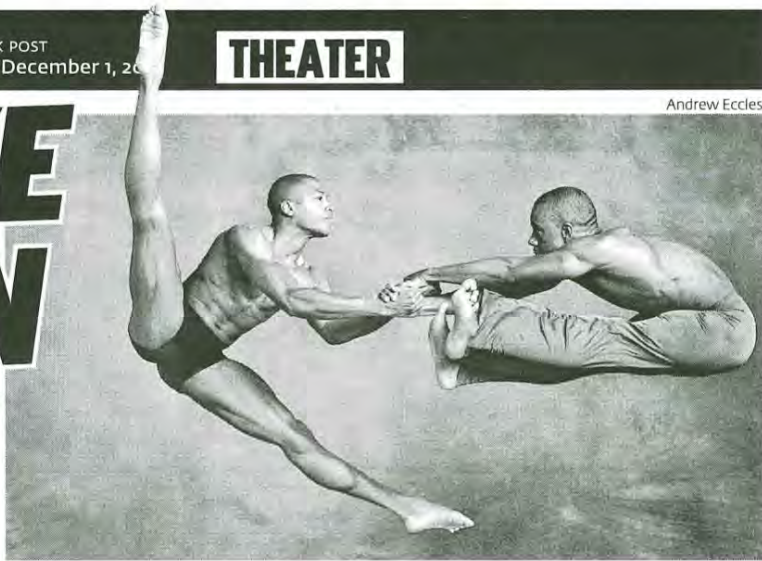


Andrew Eccles

LOVE IS IN THE AIR



For two male stars at Alvin Ailey, a pas de deux became a heart-to-heart

BY LEIGH WITCHEL

THE dance world's never been short on husband-and-wife partnerships — think New York City Ballet's Patricia McBride and Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, or Linda Celeste Sims and Glenn Allen Sims, who have been dancing at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater together for years.

But husband and husband?

Meet Antonio Douthit and Kirven Boyd — now known as the Douthit-Boyd, the Ailey company's newest married stars.

The couple tied the knot at City Hall on June 7, followed by a wedding reception at Ailey's Hell's Kitchen studios. The two were already thought of as a unit — the company had hyphenated their names long before they did so themselves. "For years they've been calling us the Douthit-Boyd!" says Antonio, 32.

Six feet tall and lithe, he shows off his twin diamond wedding and engagement bands.

"[Kirven's] rings are shinier because I haven't cleaned mine in a long time," he kids his spouse. Kirven, 29, doesn't miss a beat. "That's not my responsibility," he shoots back.

There was no storybook proposal on bent knee for them. They were lying in bed in their Washington Heights apartment one morning, a few months after the Defense of Marriage Act was struck down. Same-sex marriage had come to New York. Antonio says, "It was more of a discussion than a proposal, and we decided to do it."

That discussion was more than a decade in the making. They met 12 years ago, when Antonio was in the main Ailey troupe and Kirven had just joined the company's farm team, Ailey II. When both companies toured Los Angeles, the two became friends, but not more. Each was otherwise engaged.

But those relationships ended, and two days after Valentine's Day 2006, Kirven asked Antonio to go out with him. They soon became inseparable, even though their paths had been very different.

Growing up in Boston, Kirven found acceptance early on. "A cousin had already come out and she broke the ice," he says, laughing.

Antonio, on the other hand, grew up fatherless and poor in St. Louis. He and his mother went through tough times together — for a while, they lived in a shelter.

His mother had a "don't ask, don't tell" attitude, he says: Sexuality was nothing she cared to discuss. When he did come out at 17, she disparaged him, telling him he'd get sick and die. It was only later, he says, that they were able to start mending fences. Antonio's mother never did meet Kirven: She died unexpectedly.

But you'd never know that from the joy on the couple's wedding day, when Kirven's mother catered a soul-food feast and their first dance together turned into a trio as his grandmother joined them on the dance floor.

Though the two men often work together, they're different enough dancers that there's little competition.

"He's a great turner, a fantastic mover," Antonio says. "I feel I'm more concerned with line."

"We get to learn from each other," Kirven adds.

Robert Battle, Ailey's artistic director, agrees.

"They're amazing," he says. "Separate or together, they're great artists,



Ellyn Ferguson Photography

Groom to move: the Douthit-Boyd — Kirven, left, and his husband Antonio — onstage (top) and on their wedding day (above).

but together they have a special connection that adds to their impact on the stage."

Granted, it's not easy living and working together 24/7.

"We have disagreements all the time, but he's the only one I want to go through those things with," Antonio says. "I know how to deal with him," Kirven adds. "I understand him."

You can see both men in Wayne McGregor's "Chroma" when Ailey opens its season Dec. 4 at New York City Center.

"Our marriage wasn't a political statement," Kirven says. "We wanted to be married, we loved each other and that was the only thing that fueled this. The way to be the biggest inspiration is to live the life that you want."

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performs Dec. 4 to Jan. 5 at New York City Center, 131 W. 55th St., 212-581-1212.

POST SU DOKU Puzzles on Page 20

1	2	4	6	10	7	11	8	5	9	12	3
8	12	9	3	1	5	2	6	7	11	4	10
10	11	7	5	9	12	3	4	6	1	2	8
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