



Q&A: Troy Powell, Ailey II Artistic Director

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By Annika Harris

Ailey II, the youthful second company of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, returns to its home at The Ailey Citigroup Theater in New York from March 13 through 24, to perform beloved numbers like “Revelations” and new choreography. This is the first season led by the recently-appointed artistic director, **Troy Powell**, who has a unique Ailey story all his own. He’s a veteran dancer, choreographer, teacher, and the former associate artistic director of Ailey II. But there’s more to Powell’s story than a string of titles, including being chosen at the age of 9 by dance icon and founder **Alvin Ailey**, *himself*. Keep reading to learn more about Powell, Ailey II, the importance of arts scholarships, and more!



UPTOWN: How did you get your start at Ailey?

Powell: I started at Ailey at the age of 9. I was handpicked by Mr. Ailey himself. I was offered a scholarship to be in a program entitled Arts Connection through Ailey’s Arts in Education department.

U: What does it mean to you to be one of the few who not only knew Alvin Ailey, but also was taught by the him?

P: Having Mr. Ailey in my life at an early age was life changing; not only did he serve as a mentor, [but] he was also a father figure – which was something I didn’t have growing up. He was very inspirational as well as loving, especially when it came to encouraging the next generation of dance talent.

U: How has your work with Judith Jamison and Sylvia Waters impacted you?

P: Working with Judith Jamison and Sylvia Waters has been a blessing. They both taught me how to remain humanistic as an artist/teacher/choreographer, and also to continue to inspire those coming up after me.

U: How has becoming the second person to hold the title of artistic director of Ailey II impacted you?

P: Becoming the second person to [hold the position of artistic director of] Ailey II is an honor. Filling the shoes of 38-year former artistic director Sylvia Waters is a challenge that I’m looking forward to tackling.



U: Why is it important to highlight the work of Ailey II, in addition to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater?

P: I think it’s important to highlight the works of Ailey II as much as it’s important to highlight the works of The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater because I feel young dancers, as well as, emerging choreographers have a lot to say in this day and age. Young dancers (Ailey II) are reaching for their goals as professionals, so there’s a certain hunger, ambition that these artists possess when they’re on stage. It’s always so wonderful to see dance from a younger perspective.

U: Do you think your life would be different if you hadn’t been awarded a scholarship to attend The Ailey School? Why are scholarships within the arts important?

P: I truly think my life would be different had I not received a scholarship to Ailey. I’ve always been a

performer at heart, so if Ailey didn't come into my life, I still would've been in the field, but who knows how my future would have been re-written.

Scholarships are very important. It's very expensive to study dance and everyone doesn't have the means to pay for years of training. Often times, scholarships make it possible for a student to study, when without financial assistance the opportunity would not be attainable.



U: Please speak a little about the recurring dance numbers, like “Revelations,” and the new choreography that Ailey II will perform. What can new and old fans expect?

P: I curated two very different programs so that audience members can get a taste of the old and the new. Fans of all ages and backgrounds will be entertained and delighted no matter if they see the traditional work, which will give them more of the spirit and energy of Alvin Ailey, or the new works program, which will showcase what choreographers of this generation are creating today. It's fresh, it's new it's today!

U: How would you “sell” Ailey II to someone who isn't necessarily a fan of dance in a theater setting?

P: I don't have to sell Ailey II; Ailey II speaks for itself. It is a young, energetic company that combines the spirit and energy of today's best young emerging choreographers with 12 dancers, who are [at] the edge of breakout professional careers. These are dancers that are not only educating audiences, they're also educating themselves and using tools acquired during their two years with Ailey II to grow as artists on stage. This isn't just a regular dancer company, these dancers are young, special, and have a very unique humanistic quality in the way they approach the work, on stage as well as off.

For tickets to the Ailey II 2013 New York Season, please visit www.AlvinAiley.org/AileyII or call 866-811-4111.