

May 9, 2013

# Ailey, Front and Center at the Apollo

By REBECCA BRATBURD

“Oh, and don’t mess up,” Robert Battle said backstage to students of the Ailey School, some as young as 7 years old, before they took the Apollo stage on Tuesday night as a part of the company’s annual fundraiser.

“It’s true, I’d rather you not mess up, but it’s also an outrageous thing to ask. That calms them down a little,” Mr. Battle, the artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, told us after the show.

The sold-out event raised just over \$1 million for scholarships to the Ailey School and its array of educational outreach programs.

About 900 attendees

watched performances from all arms of the Ailey organization, including New York- and Newark, N.J.-based dancers from AileyCamp, a program for underserved youth around the country; the intensive Ailey II training program; and the world-class Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

“Some of these young people never thought they would be on the Apollo stage, and certainly not on the same stage in the same evening with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater,” Mr. Battle said. “For them to be living out their dreams, I can’t imagine the impact that’s going to have on them and the people who know them. Not only them, but their families, and

everyone involved.”

New York Knicks center Tyson Chandler and his wife, Kimberly, served as honorary chairmen of the gala. While duty called Mr. Chandler to Madison Square Garden for a game on Tuesday night, Ms. Chandler and one of their daughters were at the Apollo.

“I loved every aspect of [the performances]. It just draws you in, and I love the intensity that the dancers have,” Ms. Chandler said. “I haven’t been to many performances where you can see the emotion in the dancers’ faces and it’s awesome sitting this close. Seeing the sweat fly, that was exciting for me.”

One of Ailey’s most acclaimed dancers, Alicia Graf

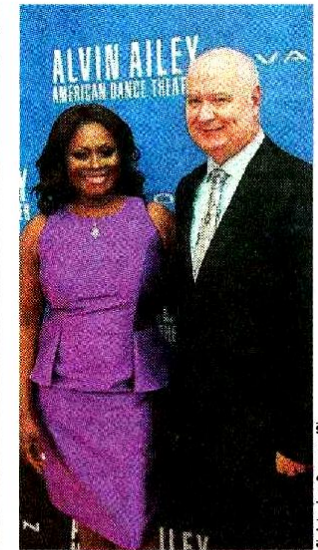
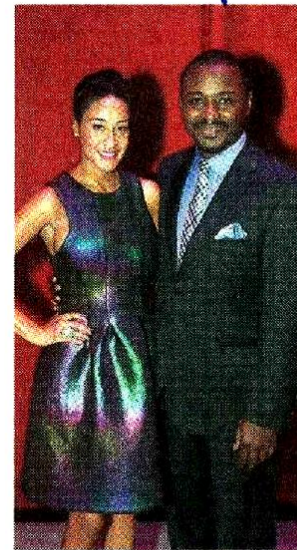
Mack, said the emotion was genuine.

“I had a moment on the stage when I said to myself, ‘I am on the Apollo stage, in this role, and this is really historic,’” Ms. Graf Mack said, who was given the distinguished role of holding the umbrella in the ensemble’s rendition of the 1960 arrangement, “Revelations.”

She’s been involved with Ailey’s community outreach programs for years.

“It brings art back to the people, and that’s what Mr. Ailey’s mission was.”

After the performances, patrons waltzed over to a lavish tent behind the Apollo for dinner, drinks and dancing with members of the Ailey company.



Left, honorary chairwoman Kimberly Chandler and artistic director Robert Battle. Right, Angela and Robert Kissane.

Christopher Duggan (2)