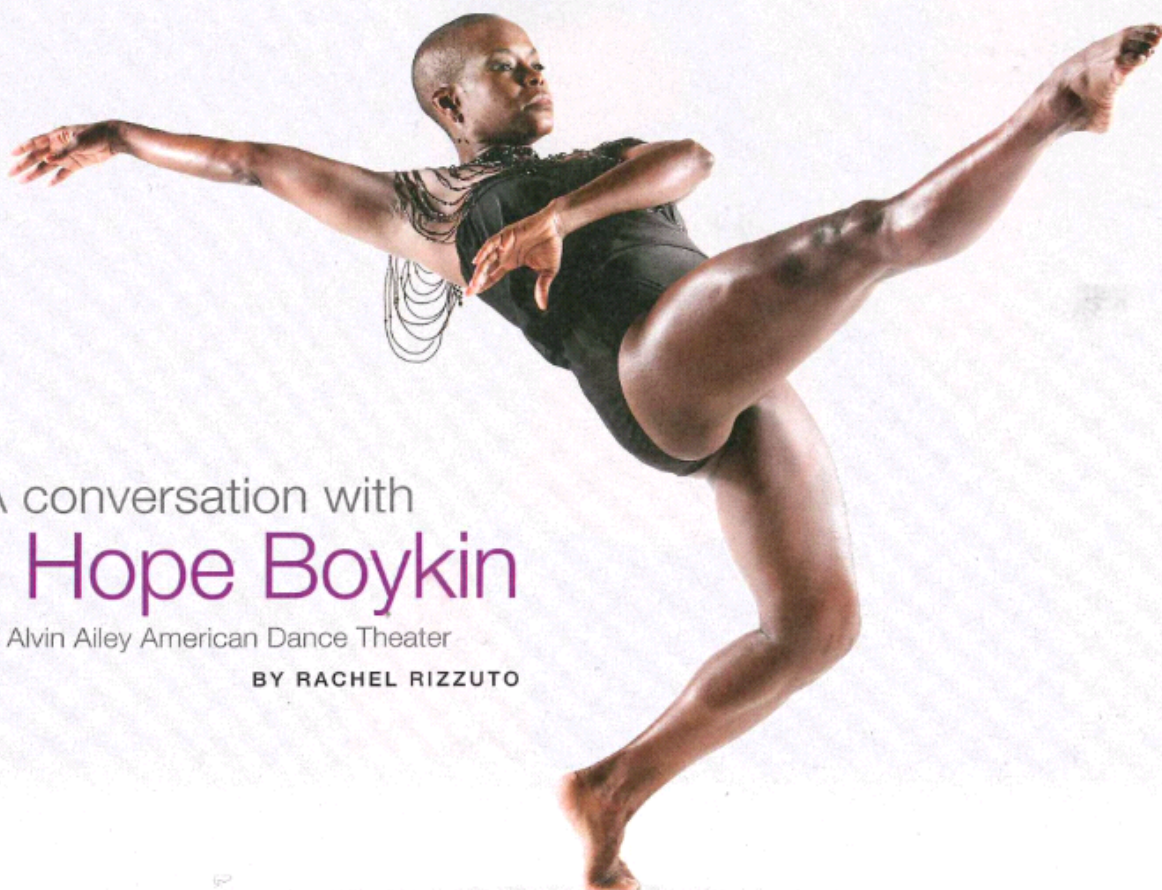


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A conversation with Hope Boykin

of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

BY RACHEL RIZZUTO

Performance: founding member of Complexions Contemporary Ballet; danced with Philadanco 1994–2000; joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, 2000

Choreography: has created work for AAADT, Philadanco, Dallas Black Dance Theatre

Teaching: guest artist at University of the Arts and Howard University; teaches Horton technique for The Ailey School

IT wasn't until Dwight Rhoden handed her a check for her first performance with Complexions that Hope Boykin realized it was possible to earn a living from dance. "I was like, 'What is this?'" she says. "That was my first paid performance gig. I had no idea that was the beginning of my professional life."

During the 20 years that followed, Boykin has had her struggles—her weight, for one. The directors of both Philadanco and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater requested that she lose weight before letting her perform. But Boykin decided to greet every challenge as an opportunity for growth. She recently celebrated 15 years with the Ailey company. A special program honored her as part of AAADT's winter season.

Keeping her dancing fresh "I can count on both hands and maybe a couple of toes the times I've started out not feeling like it. And in the middle, I realize this is not about me. You have to do it as if the person seeing you is seeing it for the first time. [Ailey artistic director] Robert Battle talks about the first time he saw an Ailey performance at a school show. If I had

been in that school show, and I wasn't feeling like it, then he might not have understood something."

Finding her place in Philadanco "Joan Myers Brown pulled me into her office and said, 'I really like you, but you're gonna have to work on your weight.' You know that saying, 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger'? No, what doesn't kill you just doesn't kill you. Because I wasn't performing, she gave me other opportunities: I helped to roll out the marley floor. I was steaming costumes. I was running rehearsals. She'd have me sub a class. Before you know it, I'm dancing, and she's sending me out on residencies or having me hold auditions for the company."

Her favorite Ailey piece "Do you want to hear the typical response, that it's *Revelations*? Because it is! [Boykin often leads the opening pyramid in "I Been Buked."] *Revelations* is this piece that touches everyone. You go places where people don't speak your language but they understand movement. It goes beyond the footlights; it's human. If you've seen it, you understand. If you know someone who hasn't seen it, you buy them a ticket." **DT**