

Dance

Edited by
Gia Kourlas
dance.ny@timeout.com
@gakourlas

Hope springs eternal

Who else could be Odetta? Ailey powerhouse Hope Boykin graces Matthew Rushing's latest. By **Gia Kourlas**

At Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Hope Boykin is a force: as daring as she is vulnerable. In Matthew Rushing's premiere *ODETTA*, inspired by the influential folk singer Odetta Holmes, Boykin is the title character. "I feel like I'm the through-line of the piece," she says. But for her, it's more than just another dance. This season marks Boykin's return from a shoulder injury that gave her time to reconsider her life at Ailey. She shares why she came back.

How did you hear about *ODETTA*?

Matthew and I were on our way to church one day, and he said, "You know those times when you choreograph for someone? I choreographed this for you." I just went into a brief hysteria. I couldn't stop crying. Hearing that was something. I knew he trusted me, but I didn't know how much I trusted myself. My injury last June took me out of the action for two-and-a-half months, and it was great. I got a chance to see myself. My mirror was wiped clean. I wasn't pretending. I dealt with a lot of personal things. I was constantly trying to prove to myself that I was still able to do this.

To do what?

Alvin Ailey. Because you don't realize that you're on a constant train, and when you get off, you have to run past it. My coworkers have not stopped. They are superheroes. Every one of them has on a cape. The pause that I took put me in a different place. I was like, How do I catch back up?

Did you want to?

I absolutely wanted to. The break taught me that I love it. It was eye-opening to realize that I was not finished in this realm.

Why did you break down when Matthew told you about *ODETTA*? Do you not feel you're valued as a dancer?

I don't think any dancer feels what others see. I would love to think that it's all about me doing all the things that I want to do, but the gift of dance is to give it away. It doesn't deplete you. The more I remember that, the easier it is for me to continue to do it, which is why I know it's not finished. I have a storehouse of gifts that have to be given away.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is at New York City Center through Jan 4.



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