

THE ST. LOUIS AMERICAN

Douthit-Boyd's return to the Fox marks 10 years with Ailey

By Kenya Vaughn | April 17, 2014

Over the past few years The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has been marking significant milestones.

Kicking off with the 50th anniversary of the company in 2008, they celebrated the golden anniversary of the dance troupe's signature ballet "Revelations" in 2010 and a changing of the guard in 2011 when famed artistic director Judith Jamison passed the torch to Robert Battle.

In 2014, St. Louis has a personal stake in a particular moment tied to Ailey. It was 10 years ago this year that COCA alumnus Antonio Douthit-Boyd joined the company.

"Time really flies. It doesn't feel like 10 years," Douthit-Boyd said. "The only reason it feels like 10 years is because you get your one week vacation."

Ailey boasts some of the best dancers in the world, and Douthit-Boyd has spent his tenure with the company rising through the ranks of the elite to become a principal performer – and a star of the dance world. He's been individually praised by the *New York Times* and heralded by dance dignitaries from around the world.

St. Louis will have a chance to personally praise Douthit-Boyd when he returns with the company to the Fox Theater next weekend thanks to Dance St. Louis.

"Before we even get to St. Louis – like the week coming up – I always have these long conversations with myself in my head about how to stay calm and how to do exactly what you've been doing in every other city and every other country," Douthit-Boyd said. "It's a pressure, because you know everybody from home will be watching."

"But when I get on that stage, I'm put at ease. It's like dancing in my living room. The moment I get out there, all of the stress that I've put myself through goes away, because I know everyone is there out of love and support. I think I dance better in St. Louis because the moment I hit the stage I feel this overwhelming joy from support."

He stumbled into dance towards the end of his teens, at a time where most of his peers had already begun the path towards their professional careers.

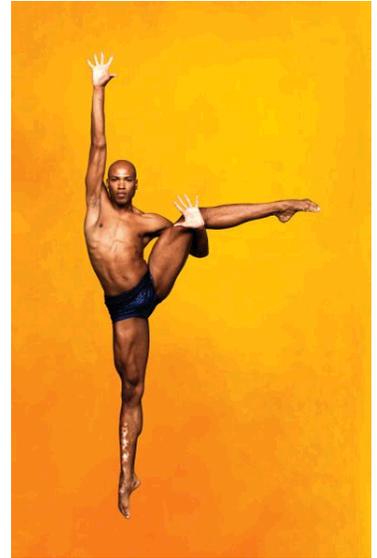
"It's amazing because I started dancing so late," Douthit-Boyd said. "My dance trajectory wasn't, 'Oh, I'm going to go away and be famous and show everybody from St. Louis.' It was that I loved dancing and I did every and anything to move forward with it. I pretty much danced at every dance studio in St. Louis that offered a free class."

COCA recognized his gift for movement and nurtured it – followed by Judith Jamison.

"I thank Ms. Jamison for giving me an opportunity I probably wouldn't have had if I had danced in another company," Douthit-Boyd said. "She helped me step my career up and bring my story to the forefront, so that people could understand why I was dancing, how I started dancing and that they can start dancing too."

He feels he is helping to fulfill Alvin Ailey's vision.

"Whenever we take the stage as a company we feel as if we have to take it up a notch so that we can survive another 50 years, and take it to the next generation and the next generation so we keep passing that tradition down of being human and taking our spirit to the stage," Douthit-Boyd said.



Photos by Andrew Eccles

“It’s like folklore – a story we working to make sure continues to get told.”

Like folk tales, Ailey’s company focuses on the basics.

“People resonate and relate to Ailey because we are a company that dances about human experiences,” Douthit-Boyd said. “We’re not fairies or swans or things that you can’t really relate to. There are things that people can say, ‘I’ve gone through that’ and ‘I know what they are talking about.’”

Within the past couple of years, his best friend and fellow world-renowned dancer Alicia Graf-Mack made her triumphant return to Ailey. Her most recent hiatus, partly forced by injuries, included pursuing studies at Washington University and instructing at COCA.

“She’s defied any odds and any struggle that has come in her life,” Douthit-Boyd said. “It’s so amazing to be a part of this company with her, dancing on stage with a person like that, whose heart is so big and so open for love and for dance.” He hopes that St. Louis audiences also support the local artists who remain local.

“I want them to get out and enjoy the arts in St. Louis,” he said, “because St. Louis has such great art – and not just dance, but painters and musicians.”

Dance St. Louis welcomes the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to The Fox on April 25-26 at 8 p.m. For more information, visit www.dancestlouis.org. For tickets, visit www.metrotix.com or call (314) 534-1111.



Paul Kolnik

