

The Week in New York



Blues Suite

Leaps and bounds

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater celebrates its 45th season at New York City Center.
By Leah Faye Cooper

It's the last day of rehearsal before Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater begins its monthlong winter season, and from his office in the company's Hell's Kitchen complex, artistic director Robert Battle is preparing a lineup that blends beloved works from the company's past with highly anticipated, never-before-seen dances.

"For five weeks, we try to give New York everything we have," says Battle. "You don't just see an Ailey performance—you feel it."

This year, those feelings will come via a revival of *Blues Suite*, the first masterpiece founder and choreographer Alvin Ailey created for

the company, which premiered in the group's 1958 debut performance on a tiny stage at the 92nd Street Y. Audiences will also be treated to the world premiere of Kyle Abraham's *Untitled America: First Movement*, the first piece in a three-part series that examines

the multigenerational impacts of incarceration. Battle, who was picked to lead the company in 2011 by his legendary predecessor Judith Jamison, will present his first work as artistic director, set to a score by John Mackey.

"It's called *Awakening* because it reflects my own creative awakening," says Battle, adding that it was important to settle into his role before

focusing on his own creative pursuits. "This just seemed like the right time. I've had enough time to simmer, as they say, and I care less about whether the piece is a success or failure, because I made a dance that comes from my heart."

This winter, Ailey fans will also experience *Open Door*, a world premiere from choreographer Robert K. Brown that came out of his 2013 trip to Havana. It's set to the vibrant, rhythmic beats of Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra. Ailey's seminal 1971 ballet, *Cry*, choreographed as a birthday present for his mother and famously performed by Jamison, will also make a comeback.

Company dancer Jacqueline Green, who is set to appear in both *Open Door* and *Cry*, says she'll bring the pieces to the stage with a very clear goal.

"When I go out and appreciate other art, I like it to distract me from whatever I'm stressing about," the 25-year-old Harlem resident says as she prepares for rehearsal. "I want to do the same for audiences. I want them to stop worrying about what's going on in the outside world—and there's a lot going on—and just have two and a half hours of peace and joy."

For Green and her fellow company members, getting it right takes lots of discipline, sweat and practice—all of which are instantly apparent when Battle steps into the rehearsal studio, takes his seat and shouts, "From the top!"

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performs at New York City Center Wed 2-Jan 3 (alvinaley.org). \$25 and up.

