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ARTS & CULTURE

“Alvin Ailey Holds that Mirror to Society—Through Art”

By Darrell Canty



Alvin Ailey, Artistic Director Robert Battle.
Photo by Andrew Eccles

The Alvin Ailey Dance Theater continues to globally expand its diverse brand of breathtaking per-formances under the strategic artistic direction of Robert Battle. Battle, was raised here in Liberty City,

Miami. In 2011, the great Judith Jamison personally selected him, to become the next Artsic Director. Battle, whom I interviewed for Legacy shortly after his appointment, has seamlessly implemented his vision of community unification through art while utilizing a vessel made up of multi-race races in the process.

Legacy: You’ve now made some changes to the “Ailey” experience since we last spoke. What was that process like for you?

Battle: “It was tough. It was trying to trust my own instincts—trust why Judith Jamison chose me. And then make decisions that I knew would be unexpected and that would push the audience in a different direction. So it was trying to balance that out—to the sense of daring and embracing the history of the company in terms of the repertory. I didn’t want to alienate people, but I didn’t want it to remain the same”.

Legacy: Your new book is entitled “My Story, My Dance: Robert Battle’s Journey to Alvin Ailey”. Why do you think it’s important for young children to read about your

experience?

Battle: “Young people need to be encouraged to use their imagination. I was picked on as a child, had physical challenges, raised by my Great Aunt and Uncle. I was the outsider kid. But some-how, because I had a vision for myself—I was able to tap into that. But I think its important for kids to see those images from people who may look like them and how to use that story for en-couragement as they go through their lives.”

Legacy: Will you use your artistic vision to combat the societal ills of today? And how aggressive will you be in your direction?

Battle: “Very!—I think though there’s also a need to entertain, that’s part of what we do as well. But, I definitely want to do work that has to do with social justice—something to do with ‘holding that mirror to society,’ as Mr. Ailey would say. Those kind of works are the backbone of this company. And it was “Revelations” that made me want to dance seriously. Dance is

one of our most primal forms of expression. So using that expression to shine a light on some of the issues of the day is something that is very important to me—and to the future of this company.”

Legacy: If you were going to choreograph a performance based on your Miami experience how would you stage it?

Battle: “Wow—that’s interesting. I think it would be some of everything. Especially, when I think of my own life growing up in Liberty City. The work would express everything from classical music to hip hop and gospel. And I think the negative aspects of what was happening in the neighborhoods all over this country. The work would underscore perils such as drug dealing and domestic issues. Also, there would have to be a sense of hope. It would have to be the end part of the work—because there was always hope. There were always people doing great things and people taking care of each other. And sometimes those stories don’t get told.”