



A Conversation with Alvin Ailey Director Robert Battle and His Mom

By: Nadege Green
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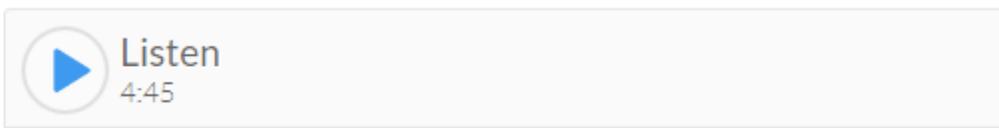
Robert Battle and his cousin Dessie Horne, who raised him, pose for a photo at the African Heritage Cultural Art Center in Liberty City on Jan. 18. Robert Battle is the artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

He was raised in Liberty City by his cousin Dessie Horne, who he calls his mother. Horne is a deeply spiritual woman who helped shape his love for the arts.

Battle rarely lets an interview go by without mentioning her impact on him. She's his biggest cheerleader and his inspiration.

On a recent afternoon, Battle and Horne sat down at the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center in Liberty City and reminisced.

Listen to the conversation below:



From a very young age, Robert Battle would watch Dessie Horne perform with a theater troupe she belonged to called "The Afro-Americans." An educator by profession, Horne always had a dream to become an actress. On her Liberty City porch she and her friends would act out scripts and recite monologues all while a young Robert Battle sat by -- entranced by it all.

I remember 'The Afro-Americans' and when you all would rehearse on the front porch, rehearsing different songs, poetry and skits relating to the black experience. But what struck me, you seemed to just grow six more inches or feet because of taking on these characters and taking on these words. -Robert Battle

Robert Battle didn't start dancing until he was in high school, a late start in the dance world. He danced at Miami Northwestern High and then New World School of the Arts.

In his Liberty City neighborhood, he was sometimes bullied by neighborhood kids for being a dancer.

I remember you telling me one time about a guy who was standing on the corner bullying you and you said to him, 'Listen, I'm gonna have a career in New York and when I come back you'll still be standing on the corner.'
-Dessie Horne

Battle's family supported his dancing and watched him grow artistically. Horne said she didn't know she was raising the future director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; she just wanted him to shine.

I hope that parents who have talented children will, instead of quashing those seeds, will develop them because so many times little children have inklings and bents and because of the poverty and other hardships in life, parents say, 'That's foolish. Do something that's gonna bring in some money.' And they kill the kid's spirit. I just hope from your story people realize talent comes in all sizes, shapes, colors and round heads. -Dessie Horne

The Alvin Ailey dance company will be performing at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts Feb. 18-21. For more information, visit arshtcenter.org

Hear the full conversation between Robert Battle and his mom here: <http://wlrn.org/post/conversation-alvin-aiiley-director-robert-battle-and-his-mom>