

Luminary



*dancer/choreographer,*  
**Vernard Gilmore**

By FRED CUMMINGS

He hails from the Windy City and has graced some of the world's finest stages performing with one of the most iconic and graceful dance companies of our time. Vernard Gilmore always dreamt of being right where he is, a member of the acclaimed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. Today, along with performing some of the most revered Ailey classics, Gilmore adds teacher and choreographer to his growing collection of artistic hats in the field. I had a chance to query the artist as he gears up to perform with the company in its Chicago spring residency and what became clear pretty quickly was that this was an artist who has always been focused, understood the gravity of the dreams he's achieved and absolutely appreciates the path and the people that go him there.

What kind of goals did you have as a young dance student studying at Chicago's Curie Performing and Creative Arts High School?

While studying at Curie High School, my goal was simply to get better. I was so inspired by my classmates that all I wanted was to work hard and commit to being my very best in the art of dance.

Did you envision that the career you have today in dance and choreography was possible then?

I believed whole-heartedly that I would work hard to have a successful career in dance, and that many possibilities were within my reach. So yes, after seeing *Revelations* on video, I envisioned myself in the Ailey company. It was a constant aspiration. I daydreamed about it most of the time.

Tell me about performing at the White House Tribute to Judith Jamison. What was it like to be a part of that?

Ms. Jamison is and was a constant inspiration. I continue, like I always have, to observe her meticulously. She truly taught me to hold on to the past, live in the present, and reach fearlessly into the future. So to honor her anywhere is an honor for me. Being able to do it at the White House was particularly special, because of its historical significance. Meeting the First Family and being in this building that most Americans will probably never get to see was moving, to say the least.

Alvin Ailey enjoyed something of a renaissance with the tenure of artistic director Robert Battle in that the company's repertoire both broadened and looked back at the key Ailey works like the beloved *Revelations* that cemented the company in modern dance lore. How would you describe the growth the company has seen in Battle's tenure?

Mr. Battle continuously pushes us past our boundaries to discover something we may not have known. That has always been my experience with the company, and Mr. Battle continues that legacy, through his vision and how he wants to give to the world.

Tell me about the company's spring Chicago residency at the Auditorium Theatre. We know there will be some familiar favorites. Can audiences expect some of the surprises we have come to see in recent years?

With the Ailey company there are always surprises because it's live theater. The variety of works that will be performed in Chicago will no doubt uplift you, whether Mr. Ailey's classic ballets like *Cry* and *Love Songs* or Mr. Battle's new work *Awakening*. Expect to be surprised, to be moved, and to be changed when you leave the theater.

What do you like most about coming back to Chicago performing before your home town audience?

What I love most about coming back to Chicago and performing for my hometown audiences is the opportunity to give back to the city that gave me so much. It is a true blessing to be able to show everyone my deep appreciation for how they helped me become who I am today.

What guilty pleasure do you indulge most when you return here?

When I'm home the one thing I indulge in the most is Garrett's popcorn. No matter where they set up franchises around the country, nothing tastes as good as the popcorn from the Chicago shops.

And truly there is nothing like Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre at their Chicago home, Auditorium Theatre. See Vernard and the company known as American's Cultural Ambassadors when during their spring residency here March 8 – 13, 2016.

Visit [AuditoriumTheatre.org](http://AuditoriumTheatre.org) for tickets of for more details.



From Top: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre dancer Vernard Gilmore in Bill T. Jones' *D-Man in the Waters*; Gilmore with Alvin Ailey's Alicia Graf Mack in Wayne McGregor's *Chroma* (photo by Paul Kolbuk); Gilmore in the Alvin Ailey classic, *Revelations* (photo by Andrew Eccles).