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Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's summer festival begins Saturday with company's epic "Revelations" plus a hip-hop piece. Each show throughout the 10 days is different. PAUL KOLNIK

BY KARU F. DANIELS
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The heat is on in New York, but Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is giving New Yorkers plenty of reason to get outside.

The iconic dance company is beginning a series of free events throughout the city from Saturday through Aug. 1. Called Ailey Moves NYC, the 10-day summer celebration will include performances by the company, classes, workshops and screenings of Jamila Wignot's acclaimed 2021 documentary "Ailey."

"New York City and its people have been an inspiration for Ailey artistry since [its] first performance here in 1958 and we are excited to be reaching across the five boroughs this summer for all to experience the joy of dance," Alvin Ailey artistic director Robert Battle told The Daily News. "It's a way to give back by sharing uplifting revelations and saying thank you with each step."

Festivities start Saturday with an afternoon family workshop of West African dance with live drumming, followed by

an evening of performance by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the Amphitheater at Coney Island Boardwalk, presented by City Parks SummerStage.

"New York is an expensive city, and the arts are not immune to that," City Parks Foundation dance curator and programs manager Danni Gee said.

The former Ailey alum has been bringing dance and arts to the city's sometimes overlooked communities for free through the nonprofit organization for more than 16 years.

"I think dance for some people could still be a little foreign and off-putting and even though Alvin Ailey is a very popular and well-known company, after the past few years, people are hurting in the pockets," she continued. "And for us to be able to bring such a well known, amazing company, like Alvin Ailey to the parks for free is a huge accomplishment. And I think it's a huge gift to the city of New York."

Hip hop innovator Rennie Harris' acclaimed work "Lazarus" will be featured on Saturday's program, alongside the fabled Alvin Ailey American spirituals-based masterpiece "Revelations."

Inspired by the life and times of the company's late-trailblazing namesake, Harris' one hour, two-act, 15-person ballet, which premiered in 2018, addresses the racial inequities that existed when the Texas-born Ailey founded his company in 1958, and those that are still with us.

Set to a soundtrack produced by Darrin Ross and featuring Nina Simone, Terrence Trent D'Arby, Michael Kiwanuka and Odette, "Lazarus" is credited with breathing new life into the Alvin Ailey legacy.

"One of the brilliant parts of Mr. Ailey is that he'd already decided a long time ago that he was celebrating choreographers other than himself and having them set work on this company," Harris said. "And I don't know any other company that is set up that way. And I think this is a reason why Ailey is still around as a company, because we mostly hear that when a choreographer dies, the company soon dies after. But unlike those folk, Mr. Ailey figured out a way, and that was staying alive actively and physically through new work of choreographers."

"And, my God, I had no clue what this work would do, or where it would land.

So I never thought about it twice, and once it happened, I said, 'Whoa this is massive.' But I'm more than honored and happy and humbled by the thought that I may be breathing life into the company."

The Ailey Moves NYC festival will also feature a Latin-style dance class at Gil Heron Amphitheater in the Bronx on Sunday, a Bryant Park Picnic performance by Ailey II on July 28, an "Ailey" screening at Staten Island's Snug Harbor Cultural Center on July 29 and a West African dance class on Beach 17 Far Rockaway in Queens on July 30.

Events conclude on July 31 with a West African & Hip-Hop Dance Workshop at Jackie Robinson Park in Harlem and Aug. 1 with a screening of "Ailey" at Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem.

Classes and workshops are a part of Ailey Extension, which provides dance and exercise classes for people of all ages, and Ailey Arts in Education programs.

"Alvin Ailey said that 'Dance came from the people and should always be delivered back to the people.' And I emphasize 'always' and in 'all ways' as we launch Ailey Moves NYC," Battle said.