

# EBONY

## 7 ICONIC ALVIN AILEY DANCES THAT SHOULD BE ON EVERY ENTHUSIASTS' RADAR

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Renowned choreographer [Alvin Ailey](#) started his [namesake dance company](#) back in 1958, and his work has remained timeless over the decades. Whether it's the joyous celebration of *Night Creature*, the playful *Pas de Duke*, or his most revered masterpiece, *Revelations*, his work can be a transcendent experience that has filled the hearts and souls of audiences around the globe.

As the Ailey company kicks off a [new season](#) this month, here are seven Alvin Ailey dances, some of his most iconic works, that you should familiarize with.



### *Revelations*

When Ailey premiered [Revelations](#) in 1960, he created a work that truly captured African American spirituality. Danced to song sermons, gospel songs and holy blues, *Revelations* explores concepts of grief, love, regret and redemption, ultimately ending in the holiest joy for the soul. Ailey was just 28 years old when he created this most iconic masterpiece.



### *Pas de Duke*

This Ailey dance was conceived back in 1976 for two of the greatest dancers of the 20th century: [Judith Jamison](#) and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Starting with the basic elements of ballet, a dizzying combination of arabesques, pirouettes and double turns, Ailey then infused the classic Pas de Deux with jazz and modern dance and set it all to the cool sounds of Duke Ellington.



### *Cry*

Ailey crafted this ballet as a birthday present for his dignified mother, Mrs. Cooper. Originally danced by his muse, the incomparable Judith Jamison, Ailey hand-picked her to take over as the company's artistic director in 1989. She stayed in the role for 21 years, taking the Ailey to great heights. This piece remains Ailey's love letter to Black women everywhere.



### *Memoria*

Ailey lost a good friend, fellow choreographer Joyce Trisler, in 1979. He channeled his pain and created Memoria in her honor. While the production starts off with a woman who often dances solo, even when surrounded by others, it ends in a joyous emotional crescendo. Ailey dedicated the ballet "to the joy, the beauty, the creativity and the wild spirit" of his dear friend.



### *Reflections in D*

Ailey was exploring the extent of his own skillset when he created this strong yet serene dance piece for himself in 1962. While it's only three minutes long, this solo ballet is stunning and highlights the grace, artistry and power of any male dancer who is given the opportunity to perform it.



### *Night Creature*

Considered one of Ailey's most joyous ballets, this effervescent production features a large ensemble in brightly painted outfits bursting with color. Set to the music of famed jazz composer Duke Ellington, the dance features a mix of traditional ballet fused with jazz and contemporary dance. *Night Creature* first premiered on a CBS television special, *Ailey Celebrates Ellington*, in 1976.



### *Survivors*

Ailey created *Survivors* in response to the inhumane treatment apartheid activist Nelson Mandela and his then-wife Winnie endured. The South African leader spent 27 years as a political prisoner. Premiering on stage in 1985 in Kansas City, Missouri, the ballet features six performers often separated from one male dancer. It is done with real bars on stage to represent Mandela's exclusion and imprisonment.