

AILEY II

THE NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE



COMPANY STORY

For five decades, Ailey II has merged the spirit and energy of the country's best early-career dance talent with the passion and artistry of today's most outstanding and emerging choreographers.

Founded in 1974, the company embodies Alvin Ailey's pioneering mission to establish an extended cultural community that provides dance performances, training, and community programs for all people.

Ailey II flourished into one of the most popular dance companies in the country under the leadership of Sylvia Waters, who was selected by Mr. Ailey to be its founding Artistic Director, serving in that role for the Company's first 38 seasons. With Artistic Director Francesca Harper at the helm, Ailey II continues to thrive as she brings a fresh dimension to this beloved company.

The company's repertory has included works by dance masters Alvin Ailey, Talley Beatty, Donald Byrd, Ulysses Dove, George W. Faison, Lar Lubovitch, Judith Jamison and Robert Battle as well as works by rising choreographers such as Sidra Bell, Jae Man Joo, Carlos dos Santos, and Christopher L. Huggins. Ailey II's 12 rising stars inspire audiences in dozens of cities across the globe.

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING

"The dancers in Ailey II are spectacular beings"
–The New York Times

"The dancers proved indefatigable, virtuosic and relentlessly sexy."
– Los Angeles Times

"Some of the country's best young dancers."
–The Kansas City Star



Artistic Director Francesca Harper
Photo by Nir Arieli

Ailey II in Francesca Harper's *Luminous*.
Photo by Nir Arieli

AILEY II

THE NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE



COMMUNITY OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to Ailey II's awe-inspiring performances, the company also offers three community outreach opportunities: the master class, the lecture/demonstration and the schooltime performance.

Master Class

Trained dancers take class with the young professionals of Ailey II and get a glimpse of their daily routine. One teacher and two demonstrators make it easy for participants to follow and ask questions in the 60-90 minute modern dance class. Master classes typically accommodate 25-30 students at the middle school level or older.

Lecture/Demonstration

A mixture of narration, demonstration, participation, and Q & A session, the lecture/demonstration is great for students age 8 and older. Company members demonstrate techniques from popular repertory, speak about the company's history and their personal experiences, and answer audience questions in this 45-60 minute session.

Schooltime Performances

Young students and families experience a dynamic performance with full costumes, lighting and sound that is only one hour in length – perfect for the young audience member. Programming is adapted to be age-appropriate. These performances must be held on a theater stage.



Top: Ailey II with Artistic Director Francesca Harper.
Bottom: Ailey II's Maya Finman-Palmer.
Photos by Nir Arieli

AILEY II

THE NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE



Francesca Harper, Artistic Director

Francesca Harper began her professional dance career with Dance Theater of Harlem. She was a member of William Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt from 1991-1999 where she became a principal dancer in 1994. She has performed on Broadway in productions including *Fosse*, *All Shook Up*, *The Color Purple*, *Sweet Charity*, and *Sophisticated Ladies*, and was nominated for Best Actress in a Musical by Broadway.com for her role as *Billie Holiday* in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*. Ms. Harper created her first play, 50 minutes with Harriet and Phillis, produced by Anna Deavere Smith, with her aunt, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Margo Jefferson, and Paul Miller, a.k.a DJ Spooky. In 2014, she debuted her critically acclaimed one-woman show, *The Look of Feeling*, as a writer, actor, dancer, and vocalist. She is also the writer, producer, composer, and narrator of the documentary film *To Lillian* (2021). Ms. Harper has choreographed works for companies including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, Dance Theater of Harlem, Hubbard Street II, and Tanz Graz, as well as The Francesca Harper Project, which she founded in 2005. Her television and film credits include appearances on *Boardwalk Empire*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. She served as ballet consultant for the motion picture *Black Swan* and was featured in *Zinnias – The Life of Clementine Hunter*, directed by Robert Wilson. In 2013, Ms. Harper received a Living History Award during Black History Month from Long Island University and the Innovation and Technology Award for her choreography for Fashion Week with designer Louis Vuitton. She also served as co-director and choreographer for the musical *Rose's War* and as movement director for Tommy Hilfiger and Zendaya for their fashion show at the Apollo Theater in 2019. Ms. Harper was the creator and directorial consultant for 16 world premiere virtual films. Her latest works include a new creation for Wendy Whelan, Associate Artistic Director of New York City Ballet, and poet Marc Bamuthi Joseph. Currently, Ms. Harper is engaged as Executive Producer with Sony Pictures on a series in development and pursuing an MFA in performance creation at Goddard College.



Alia Kache, Rehearsal Director

Alia Kache is the founder and director of Kachal Dance. She trained at Chattanooga Ballet and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in dance from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program. Ms. Kache's dance credits include Ailey II, Companhia Dança Contemporânea, Pilobolus Creative Services, Radio City Christmas Spectacular, Camille A. Brown & Dancers, Metropolitan Opera's *Champion*, *AIDA* and Disney's *The Lion King*. As a choreographer, her works have been performed by BalletX, Ballet Memphis, Ailey II, Madison Ballet, and Houston Contemporary. Ms. Kache is a two-time Lincoln City Fellow and former artist-in-residence with RestorationART. She is reprising her role as Ailey II rehearsal director; a role she previously held from 2012-2016.

AILEY II

THE NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE



AILEY II DANCER BIOGRAPHIES



Andrew Bryant (Miami, FL) began his formal dance training at the Young Contemporary Dance Theatre in his hometown, under the direction of Traci Young Byron. He received his BFA from Towson University where he studied under renowned artists Linda-Denise Fisher-Harrell, Vincent Thomas, and Runqiao Du. After graduating, Mr. Bryant trained at The Ailey School as a scholarship student where he performed works by Alvin Ailey, Bradley Shelver, and Rebecca Margolick. This is his second season with Ailey II.



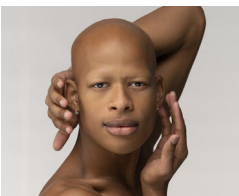
Spencer Everett (Stratford, ON, Canada) graduated from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in 2022 with an honorable mention in dance and departmental honors in visual arts. He began his dance training in a variety of techniques at a local studio in his hometown. Mr. Everett also trained at The School of Toronto Dance Theatre as a scholarship student. He has worked with choreographers Omar Roman de Jesus, Helen Simoneau, Yusha Marie-Sorzano, Jamar Roberts, and Yoshito Sakuraba, and performed in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2019 and 2021 New York City Center seasons. This is his second season with Ailey II.



Jaryd Farcon (Fords, NJ) received his degree from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program and is a graduate of Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. Mr. Farcon is a National YoungArts Foundation winner in dance and worked with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Julie Taymor. He appeared on *Dancing With The Stars*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, and in recording music group BTS's "Permission to Dance" United Nations General Assembly music video. He trained in summer programs at Jacob's Pillow, Orsolina 28, Alonzo King Lines Ballet, and Ballet Hispánico. This is his second season with Ailey II.



Maya Finman-Palmer (Madison, WI) graduated from The Ailey School where she trained in the Certificate Program. She attended summer intensives at Ballet Hispanico, Jennifer Archibald's ArchCore40, Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance, Kanopy Dance Academy, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and The Ailey School. Ms. Finman-Palmer performed as a soloist in *Prelude & Fugue*, choreographed by Lisa Thurrell, and in *Next@Graham*. She danced in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2021 New York City Center season, and has also performed works by choreographers Patrick Coker, Amy Hall Garner, Martha Graham, and Bradley Shelver. This is her second season with Ailey II.



Patrick Gamble (Queens, NY) began his dance training at the age of five in The Ailey School's Junior Division. He recently graduated from the Ailey/Fordham BFA program with a double major in Art History, through the generosity of the Gloria Kaufman Scholarship. Mr. Gamble also trained at Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Jacob's Pillow, Move NYC's Sweat, Orsolina 28, and Springboard Danse Montreal. He performed works by Robert Battle, Ohad Naharin, William Forsythe, Rena Butler, and Francesca Harper, and has appeared on the television shows *Saturday Night Live*, *Gossip Girl*, and HBO's *Random Acts of Flyness*. This is Mr. Gambles second season with Ailey II.



Alfred L. Jordan II (Memphis, TN) began his dance training at the age of 12 at a local studio in his hometown. He later studied at The Ailey School where he trained as a scholarship student. In 2021, Mr. Jordan performed in Alvin Ailey's *Bird Live* during Ailey's New York City Center gala, and in 2022, he danced in Robert Battle's *Awakening* at Ailey's Spirit Gala at Lincoln Center. He has worked with choreographers including Amy Hall Garner, Bradley Shelver, Stephanie Batten Bland, and Judine Somerville. This is Mr. Jordan's first season with Ailey II.

AILEY II

THE NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE



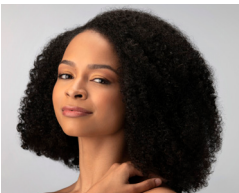
AILEY II DANCER BIOGRAPHIES



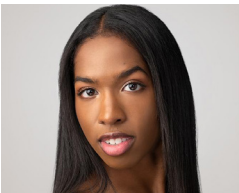
Kiri Moore (Culpeper, VA) began her dance training in Virginia at the Orange School of Performing Arts, and continued to study in Philadelphia, PA at The Rock School for Dance Education. She is a graduate of The Ailey School Certificate Program where she performed in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2021 New York City Center season. Ms. Moore has also worked with choreographers Amy Hall Garner, Bradley Shelver, Patrick Coker, Hollie Wright, and Judine Somerville. This is her first season with Ailey II.



Corinth Moulterie (Brooklyn, NY) graduated from Brooklyn High School of the Arts, where he began his formal dance training, while also studying at Harlem School of the Arts. He has trained at MOVE|NYC's Young Professionals Program, Juilliard Summer Dance Intensive, Earl Mosley's Institute of the Arts, and at The Ailey School as a Scholarship student. Mr. Moulterie has worked with choreographers, including Jeroboam Bozeman, Francesca Harper, Earl Mosley, Jermaine Spivy, Spenser Theberge and Leyland Simmons, and performed in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2022 New York City Center Season. This is his first season with Ailey II.



Kali Marie Oliver (Akrón, Ohio) graduated Magna Cum Laude from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program. She began her formal dance training with her mother and attended summer intensives at Chautauqua Institution, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and The Ailey School. Ms. Oliver has performed works by Alvin Ailey, Karole Armitage, William Forsythe, Andrea Miller, William Isaac, and Maurya Kerr. She also performed in Mr. Ailey's *Memoria* during the 2018, 2019, and 2021 Ailey New York City Center seasons, and represented The Ailey School in the 2019 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. This is Ms. Oliver's second season with Ailey II.



Tamia Strickland (Silver Springs, MD) began her dance training at the age of six. She is currently a student in the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program, where she received the 2021 Denise Jefferson Memorial Scholarship. Ms. Strickland performed in the 2020 Ailey Virtual Season, and in Ailey's 2021 Opening Night Gala at New York City Center. She has worked with choreographers, including Hope Boykin, Clifton Brown, Freddie Moore, Matthew Rushing, Janice Rosario, Chuck Wilt, and Sarah O'Gleby. This is her second season with Ailey II.



Kayla Mei-Wan Thomas (Cleveland, OH) graduated summa cum laude from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in 2022 with a double major in Digital Technologies and Emerging Media. In 2020, she was the recipient of the Denise Jefferson Memorial Scholarship. Ms. Thomas has performed works by Robert Battle, Hope Boykin, and Helen Simoneau, and has danced with the Nai Ni Chen Dance Company. This is her first season with Ailey II.



Maggy Van Den Heuvel (Houten, Utrecht, Netherlands) graduated in 2018 from Lucia Marthas Institute for Performing Arts in Amsterdam. She trained as a scholarship student at The Ailey School where she received the Joan Weill Spirit Award. Ms. van den Heuvel has performed works by Anthony Burrell, Yusha-Marie Sorzano, Ray Mercer, Norbert De La Cruz, and Kirven J. Boyd. She has appeared on *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Extra TV*, and was a lead dancer in Teyana Taylor's music video *Lose Each Other* featuring Elton John. She is also a recipient of a Young Talent Award by Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds. This is Ms. van den Heuvel's second season with Ailey II.

AILEY II

THE NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE



AILEY II APPRENTICES BIOGRAPHIES



Jennifer M. Gerken (Houston, TX) began her dance training at age six. In 2016, she was accepted into Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. In 2019, Ms. Gerken received the Mary Martha Lappe Dance Scholarship, and performed in an excerpt of *Appalachian Spring* by Martha Graham in the roles of the Bride and Follower. She was a student in the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program where she graduated in 2023. Ms. Gerken has performed works by Helen Simoneau, Mark Caserta, Ethan Colangelo, José Limón, and Paul Taylor. This is her first season as an apprentice with Ailey II.



Khosa Scott (Los Angeles, CA) was raised in Virginia where he began his dance training at The School of Richmond Ballet. He also trained at Baltimore School for the Arts, and attended summer intensives at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and The Juilliard School. Mr. Scott graduated from the Professional Children's School in New York City, and attended The University of Virginia where he majored in Art History with a minor in Anthropology. He is in the Scholarship Program at The Ailey School and has performed works by choreographers including Ronald K Brown, Amy Hall Garner, and Darrell Grand Moultrie. This is Mr. Scott's first season as an apprentice with Ailey II.



Darion Turner (Clayton County, GA) began his dance training at AileyCamp Atlanta and attended Martha Ellen Stilwell School of the Arts. He studied on scholarship at Atlanta Ballet, Eagles Landing Dance Center, and in The Ailey School's Summer Intensive. Mr. Turner is a graduate from the Certificate Program at The Ailey School and worked with choreographers Darrell Grand Moultrie, Anthony Burrell, Amy Hall Garner, and Ronald K. Brown. He also performed works by Robert Battle, Geoffrey Holder, and danced in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2022 New York City Center season. This is his first season as an apprentice with Ailey II.



Jordyn White (West Palm Beach, FL) graduated from Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts high school. She began her dance training at Raskin Dance Studio in Florida and attended summer intensives at Joffrey, Modas Dance, and The Ailey School. Ms. White performed works by choreographers Elyse Borne, Judine Somerville, Solomon Dumas, and Ronald K. Brown, and danced in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2022 New York City Center season. She is currently a student in The Ailey School's Certificate Program, and she is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology at the University of Florida. This is Ms. White's first season as an apprentice with Ailey II.

AILEY II

THE NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE



PUBLICITY HIGHLIGHTS

AILEY II

THE NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE



WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT AILEY II

“The dancers in Ailey II are **spectacular beings.**”

The New York Times

“**Highbrow/Brilliant.**”

New York Magazine

“**Ailey II audiences get to see tomorrow’s stars today.**”

New York Amsterdam News

“**Second to none.**”

Dance Magazine

“Ailey II continues the legacy of founder Alvin Ailey, delivering **pristine performances with dynamic movement and dazzling technique.**”

Atlanta Journal-Constitution

“**Young, gifted, talented and thrilling.**”

New York Amsterdam News

“The dancers...have **power and maturity.**”

New York Post

“The twelve members of Ailey II...are all **superb young dancers, with powerful jumps, leg extensions that never quit, and innate theatricality...**”

The Village Voice

“The performers’ **technique and performance quality continues to be some of the best in the country.**”

The Examiner

“...the dancers of **Ailey II simply never disappoint.** What can’t the dancers of Ailey II do?

The answer: **They can do no wrong.**”

New York Amsterdam News

“...they are, in fact, **far from human in their immense capability.**”

The Dance Enthusiast

“...there’s nothing like an evening spent with Ailey II... there were **promising, even sparkling performances.**”

The New York Times

“To watch the **outstanding crop of dancers...** is to wonder where they’ll end up next, and to hope they find jobs worthy of their talent...”

The New York Times

“Every dancer on the stage has **superb technique, unmatched musicality and enviable stamina.**”

Broadway World

4
NEW YORK
Dancing Into History at Ailey II
February 15, 2024



News 4's Checkey Beckford interviews Artistic Director of Ailey II, Francesca Harper.

Watch here: <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/on-air/as-seen-on/dancing-into-history-at-ailey-ii/5141992/> (3:31)

Why I Dance: Francesca Harper

March 2024

whyidance

Francesca Harper

Artistic director of Ailey II

My relationship with dance has been defined by witnessing. It began at an early age within the vibrant walls of the dance studio. It was more than a space of movement; it was my haven, a second home sculpted by the passion of my mother—Denise Jefferson, a devoted student and teacher of Martha Graham's technique, and eventually director at The Ailey School. She was passionately devoted to her craft.

As a single working mother, Mom's dedication amidst the height of the 1970s feminist movement was resolute. The studio often became my sanctuary as she worked passionately for what felt like 24 hours a day. She and her colleagues were on a mission, inspired by Mr. Ailey's fearless vision, on the verge of international flight. Their solidarity was palpable. It grounded me and many other aspiring artists in the New York dance community at the time.

Surrounded by dancers, from all over the globe—New York locals, talents from Baltimore, Brazil, Eastern Europe, Japan, and beyond—I found a surrogate family in the studio. As a child among them, my youth seemed to bring joy to many who were far away from home. The dancers became my guardians; they nurtured me and supported my development.

"I found a surrogate family in the studio. The dancers nurtured me."

Francesca Harper

One of my most memorable guardians was Pearl Lang, who called me Strawberry Girl, because of my love for strawberry yogurt. Ms. Lang was a Martha Graham dancer who had her own company that my mother danced for at the time. She was also the co-director of The Ailey School alongside Mr. Ailey then, a powerful leading feminist voice in the modern dance movement.

Watching these dancers in their classes began to pique my curiosity. It was as if, through their unapologetic nature and fearless subtleties, they revealed unspoken stories. The more I watched, the more I learned. Their whispers became more tenable and refined. The power of this silent expression, and my developing understanding of unspoken narratives, started to awaken the artistry within me that seemed to transcend gender and race.

My witnessing during these early years laid the foundation for my artistic journey and identity. It anchored my practice in the profound humanity and activism that I saw through others. It evolved into a comprehension of human behavior, people at their most powerful moments and in their most vulnerable ones. It was through their silent eloquence that I began to understand the artistic language of the soul. It was not only seeing their development as artists that moved me deeply, but through watching their process as human beings. As I witnessed this personal process, they became the most beautiful human beings in my eyes. I can still see and feel them living out their dreams through integrity and perseverance, one day at a time. ■



Nir Aneli, Courtesy Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

The Guardian

Mysterious Moves

September 19, 2023

Tuesday 19 September 2023 The Guardian

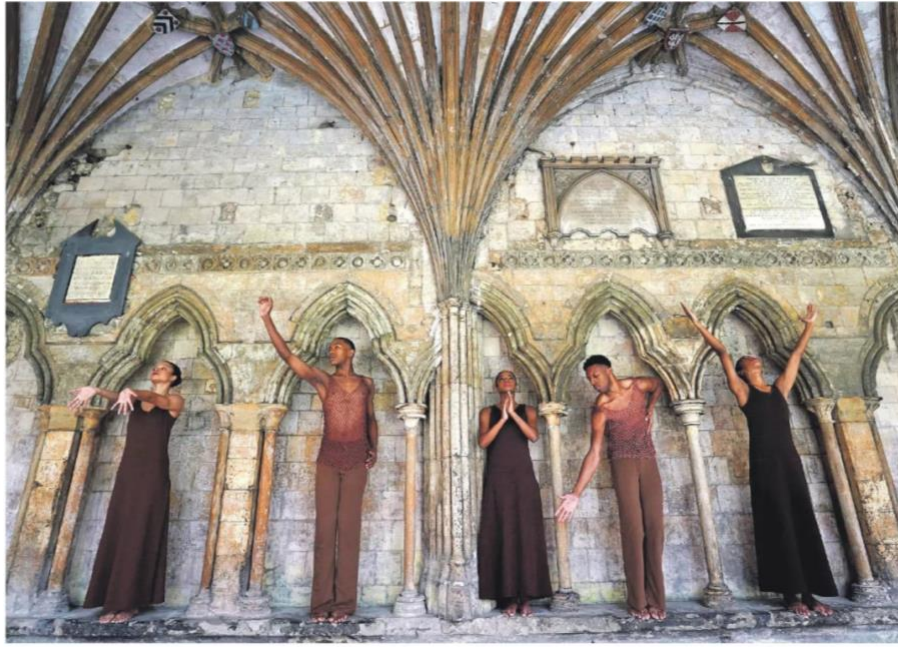
National



Mysterious moves

Dancers from the Ailey II company at Canterbury Cathedral cloisters, performing a preview of *Revelations*. The troupe is at the city's Marlowe theatre tonight and tomorrow, and touring the UK until 28 October.

PHOTOGRAPH:
GARETH FULLER/PA



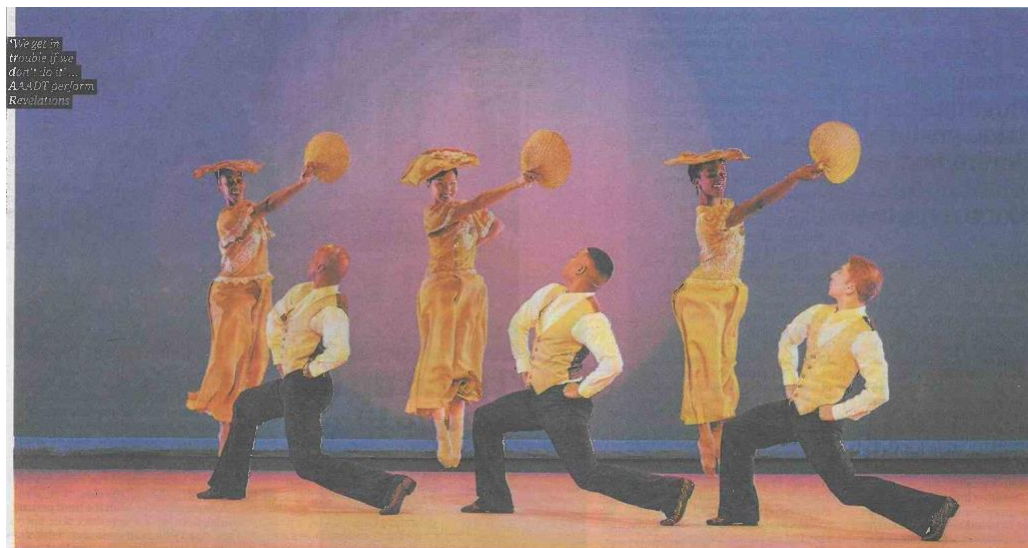
THE TIMES

[Photography: News in pictures today](#)

September 19, 2023

Dancers from Ailey II perform *Revelations* in Canterbury Cathedral. Their latest show features African American spirituals, song-sermons, gospel songs and holy blues.





'It is spirituality, made visible'

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has been performing its founder's signature work, *Revelations*, all over the world for 60 years. **Lyndsey Winship** talks to dancers past and present about the meaning and the humanity of this historic piece

Sylvia Waters former company dancer: I saw the first performance of *Revelations*, which was at the 92nd Street Y, New York, in 1960. At the time you are part of history you never realise it, of course. But I had a very visceral experience – deeply soulful. It was different from anything I'd seen a dance company do. That version of *Revelations* was almost an hour long, and the audience reaction was explosive.

Judith Jamison former dancer and artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT): 1989-2011: I was at university in the early 60s. One of our assignments was to go see this company, Alvin Ailey. I had never heard of him but I was flabbergasted by the sight of this Black company. I think there might have been eight dancers but they filled the stage. The next day in our improv class, we were just copying everything we had seen.

SW: I saw several versions between then and 1965. Alvin edited it down to 30 minutes and it became more succinct, clearer, crisper.

JW: It was a shower of blessings seeing Mr Ailey dance. He looked so muscular, not your usual "dancer". He had a big chest and muscles, that whole macho thing. And he was gorgeous. But the dance was flowing like water. It takes your breath away.

Constance Stanatou company dancer: When I was a very little girl – four or five – I saw a TV show about *Revelations*. I was in awe, growing up in the 80s and seeing a company full of dancers that looked like me.

Robert Battle artistic director, AAADT: My first encounter was on videotape but seeing it in person was an out-of-body experience. The piece is ultimately an expression of hope, told through a suite of spirituals. I grew up going to church. I sang in the choir. So this notion of faith and the Black experience, through turmoil and slavery, was familiar. The dance

was the embodiment of a kind of spirituality, made visible.

CS: I was able to really connect with *Revelations* because, just like Alvin, I also grew up in the south and in the church, where I heard a lot of those African American spiritual songs. So it really touched me and made me feel like, "oh, I could do this".

RB: It takes you on a journey of the African American experience and expression, and how the universal message of our common humanity shines through. You see different dance styles: the technique of Ailey's mentor, Lester Horton, his influences from Martha Graham and from African dance; movement direct from the church, vernacular steps, and balletic and classical.

CS: The movement style is very grounded. It's rooted from the earth and reaching to the heavens. The song 'I Been 'Buked' is about coming from the dirt, the sorrow and hard times. It's like a prayer, a very soft and yearning asking for help.

SW: Alvin was a very warm person, extremely generous, and had a great sense of humour. But in teaching the steps he didn't say very much about the work, because we were under the gun learning about 10 ballets for our first Broadway season. But we would hear him sometimes when

he talked to audiences. He talked about how, for I Been 'Buked, he was inspired by the sculptures of Henry Moore – the heaviness and the fullness and the reaching, the density of the movement.

CS: Then, in *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel*, you start to see a little more fight. All these spiral jumps and contractions when you're hitting the ground, almost like you're trying to break free.

Jaryd Farcon dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: I just love the quick energy of *Sinner Man*. It's like you are fighting for your life, you're being chased. Are you ready for the end? No! It's just a ball of energy and it's crazy.

CS: In *Wade in the Water*, there's a baptism, and a cloth that's used to mimic the ripples of the water. *Wade Girl* was probably the first role I did. I knew what that felt like, being baptised and growing up in a Baptist church. You go from calm and a little scared and not sure what this baptism is about to be, then you catch the holy ghost and you're rejoicing.

JW: The audience can't see what goes on in the wings. From *Sinner Man* to the *Yellow Section* [the finale], you have less than two minutes to change. You scramble off

Obama is a huge fan. He had a poster of Judith Jamison in his college dorm room

stage and there's a full choreography behind the scenes: quick changes, people helping each other, some already in their finale costumes but helping make the water ripple.

JJ: I remember I got upset with Mr Ailey because when I first joined I was doing the duet *Fix Me*, Jesus with James Truitt, and then he gave me *Wade in the Water* and I felt demoted! I got quietly indignant. I was standing in the wings, all poetry, then the cue came and I walked on stage and the joy took me over. That's the beauty of his choreography: it embraces you no matter how you feel.

JW: I joined Ailey II in 2020 when it was the pandemic and we had to release *Revelations* on Zoom. It was hard to figure out which was right and left. You had to move the couch – and in New York there's not much square footage. But it was great to keep going.

JJ: It's an enduring work. People love it all over the world. There are a lot of places we go where they don't understand the words necessarily, but they know how they feel.

SW: In the Soviet Union in 1970, the audience reaction was just amazing. And all these places in Ukraine – Donetsk, Kyiv, Luhansk – when I look at what's happening now, those are places we performed. The way they responded made you feel there was no language barrier.

RB: When I became artistic director in 2011, it happened to coincide with us being in Russia. I never felt

further away from home in many ways, but when *Revelations* came on I saw people in the audience acting as if it were their movement, their dance, their music.

SW: We had two weeks in London in 1970 at the old Sadler's Wells. At the last performance somebody from the audience got up on stage and was dancing with us.

CS: We performed at the White House, during the Obama administration. You know, Obama is a huge fan of Ms Jamison. Apparently he had a poster of her in his dorm room in college. He was super, super nice. I remember the dogs came in and the security guards, but it was heartwarming and just friendly and really cool.

CS: We performed in Athens in 2008. We start the work with our faces up, and I remember all I could see was this midnight blue sky filled with stars and the Acropolis lit up. It was like dancing for the gods.

JJ: Back in the day the repertory was limited so we would do *Revelations* every night. Now the company has a huge repertory, challenging the dancers to move in different ways, as Mr Ailey always wanted. But to this day people still request *Revelations*.

RB: In general we get in trouble if we don't do it. I've heard that even Alvin himself at some point asked if we could take *Revelations* out. But they told him what the box office numbers looked like with *Revelations* and without, and that was a sobering moment. But we are fortunate to have a work that, after so many years, still has fans that want to see it.

CS: It's extremely important to carry on that legacy. Alvin was a brilliant choreographer, and a Black gay man who was able to do all this during the height of the civil rights movement, and ran a company when we weren't really looked upon as good dancers or valuable as humans. It is a part of history and it should always be told.

SW: It is unique for a modern dance work to be seen so much, and it's a testament to Alvin's understanding of humanity and the human spirit. That, yes, people experience despair, struggle, repression, oppression. But they have the resilience and strength to go forward.

RB: When I started this job, journalists would say: "You've been doing *Revelations* for so long and some people say it's getting old, do you think you'll stop doing it?" And I said, "Well, when you get a stepladder and take down the Mona Lisa because so many people have seen it already. I'll do the same with *Revelations*!" Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater are at the Edinburgh International Festival, 23-25 August, and Sadler's Wells, London, 5-16 September. Ailey II tour the UK from 19 September to 28 October



Judith Jamison: 'The choreography embraces you'



Ailey II returns for an exciting season at Ailey Citigroup Theater

By: Stacy-Ann Gooden & Lauren Cook

March 22, 2023



This segment aired on 3/22/23: <https://pix11.com/news/local-news/ailey-ii-returns-for-an-exciting-season-at-ailey-citigroup-theater/> (4:04 minutes)

NEW YORK (PIX11) – The Alvin Ailey Dance Theater has become a staple in the dance world.

Its renowned second company, Ailey II will return to its home, The Ailey Citigroup Theater, for a highly anticipated annual New York season. The event will be led by Artistic Director [Francesca Harper](#).

Although in its second year, Ailey II has been around for decades. What started out as an experimental company in 1974, took on a life of its own. Their goal is to serve as a platform for the next generation of dance. Since its inception, Ailey II has been responsible for launching the careers of celebrities like Jasmine Guy, Kevin Boseman (Chadwick Boseman's brother), Vivian Nixon (Debbie Allen's daughter) and Ephraim Sykes. Next year, they'll be celebrating 50 years.

There are two programs with fourteen performances each lasting 90 minutes. They include Poetic Motion and Empowered, which highlights works by founder Alvin Ailey, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Artistic Director [Robert Battle](#), William Forsythe, Francesca Harper, Andrea Miller, and former Ailey Company member Elizabeth Roxas-Dobrich. The Dancers of Alvin Ailey II are some of New York's very own. (Brooklyn natives [Meagan King](#) and [Amar Smalls](#) as well as Queens native [Patrick Gamble](#)). The one-of-a-kind performances may just inspire you to get moving.

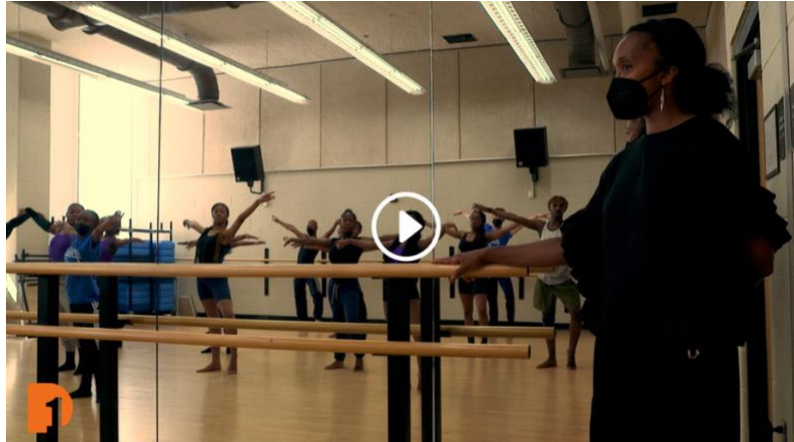
Tickets start at \$59 and can be purchased at alvinailey.org/aileyinnyc or by phone at 212-405-9082. In the spirit of dance, Ailey's Extension is offering free classes. From hip-hop, ballet, and west African, to NY style Mambo, Pilates, and Horton, new and returning dancers will learn from some of the most sought-after instructors.

Visit alvinailey.org/extension to view the [schedule of classes](#) or to sign up and learn more about the program.

Ailey II leaves influential impact on community with Detroit School of Arts visit

By: Daijah Moss

March 16, 2023



This segment aired on 3/16/23: <https://www.onedetroitpbs.org/one-detroit/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater-leaves-influential-impact-on-community-with-detroit-school-of-arts-visit/> (6:28 minutes)

The world-renowned [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater](#) has made its way to Detroit, a stop along the theater's [22-city North American tour](#). While in the city, the Ailey II division, [the theater's company of younger dancers and emerging choreographers](#), made a pit stop at the Detroit School of Arts to host a dance workshop for the students.

One Detroit contributor Daijah Moss takes viewers to the Ailey II workshop at the [Detroit School of Arts](#) for a look at the influential footprints the dancers left behind. Moss talks with Ailey II [Artistic Director Francesca Harper](#) and second-year dancer [Meagan King](#) about the importance of connecting with aspiring African American dancers and the opportunities the workshops provide to students.

Plus, Moss talks with Detroit School of Arts student Lauryn Simmons about her experiences with the Ailey II dancers. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater [performs in Detroit March 17-19](#) at the Detroit Opera.

MIAMI DANCER ONE OF AILEY II'S 'NEXT GENERATION OF DANCE'

By: Sean Erwin
February 21, 2023



Miami ties run deep in the storied New York City-based Ailey II, the second company of the world-renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Ailey luminaries like current artistic director and choreographer, Robert Battle, and 2016 Bessie Award winner, Ailey dancer and choreographer, Jamar Roberts, both hail from Miami. Now in his first year, Ailey II dancer, Andrew Bryant, joins Battle and Roberts in calling both Miami and Ailey's Manhattan studios "home." He'll perform with Ailey II at the Adrienne Arsht Center's Knight Concert Hall on Saturday, Feb. 25 in its program, "The Next Generation of Dance."

When asked how growing up in Miami prepared him for his career in dance, Bryant says that his first inspiration came while he was attending Norland Middle School in Miami Gardens. He recalls watching his older brother, Shaquille Braham, dancing for Miami icon Traci Young-Byron. "I went to his show and saw him alongside (dancer) Keenan Washington," says Bryant. "I was so inspired by the way (Washington) performed each piece. His length, musicality, and overall swag he possessed in each ballet left me in awe."

The experience inspired Bryant to audition for the Miami Northwestern Performing and Visual Arts Center under the direction of Byron. Bryant also went on to perform in Byron's Miami-based company, Young Contemporary Dance Company. The Ailey II company appeared on his radar while Bryant was still a sophomore at Towson University outside Baltimore. "I originally went to Howard University for my freshmen year of college," he says. "In search of new scenery and a different way to approach dance, I auditioned for Towson University where I met former Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater member Linda Denise Fisher-Harrell who introduced me to Ailey II."

He says his relationship with Ailey II was born out of his time at Towson. "They had a partnership with the university and would visit every year to do technical rehearsals for their upcoming tour," says Bryant. "There I would get invited to sit in on rehearsals, take classes, and get mentorship from the artistic directors." Earning his bachelor of fine arts degree from Towson, Bryant enrolled at The Ailey School where he studied for the next three years performing works by Alvin Ailey, Bradley Shriver, and Rebecca Margolick before receiving this year's invite to join Ailey II. Bryant says that having the chance to be a company member of Ailey II has been life-changing. "Being in Ailey II has forced me to make a lot of life changes for the better," says Bryant. "It's allowed me to

be more organized, to eat healthier, be more expressive, and to also embrace love and change in any situation."

Founded in 1974 as the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, Ailey II has emerged as a training ground for up-and-coming dancers, pairing fresh talent with cutting-edge choreographers. In the process, Ailey II has earned critical acclaim for showcasing a high-energy and diverse repertoire. In her second year as artistic director of Ailey II, Francesca Harper's basically grew up with the company. Born in Chicago and raised in New York City, her mother, Denise Jefferson directed The Ailey School from 1984 to 2010. Harper admits her history with the company makes her current role feel surreal.

Miller, the current artistic director of Brooklyn-based company, GALLIM Dance, took the title for the work from the Greek word for "soul." Miller became the first choreographer ever to be named the Choreographer-in-Residence for the

Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2017. Created for the Ailey company, the current version of the work is a revamp of the original and features new lighting and new costuming designed by Elias Gurrola.

For Harper, Miller's work is a natural fit with this year's program. "Andrea is a risk taker as well," explains Harper. "Her movement is very physical and imaginative and so many aspects of the movement embody the new vision of the company." And for Bryant, Miller's choreography makes him think big. "When I think of Andrea Miller's ballet Psükhe, the words 'sensual, godly, larger than life' come to mind to describe the ballet." Bryant says working with Harper has been nothing short of amazing. "She's really pushing us to be bigger than ourselves artistically and intellectually. The new vision she has for Ailey II really shines bright in each and every rehearsal, and that truly propels us to reach new heights," he says.

WHAT: Ailey II's "The Next Generation of Dance"

WHEN: 8 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 25.

WHERE: Knight Concert Hall, Adrienne Arsht Center of the Performing Arts, 1300 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami

COST: \$30, \$45, \$55, \$65

INFORMATION: 305-949-6722 and arshtcenter.org

This article is also featured on [El Nuevo Herald](#).

School Patrol: Dance troupe treats students at TPAC in Nashville

By: Vicki Yates
November 9, 2022



This segment aired on 11/9/22: <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/education/school-patrol/school-patrol-dance-troupe-treats-students-at-tpac-in-nashville> (3:19 minutes)

(NASHVILLE, Tenn. (WTVF) — At least 600 area students were in the audience at TPAC to watch a Performance by the Ailey II Dance Troupe, a dance company formed by Alvin Ailey in the mid-70s.

Most of these students were invited because they take dance or theatre classes at school. The dancers performed for an hour, and then the director and artists answered questions from students about their training and the challenges of their profession.

AVENUE

Performance Enhancers: A new wave of leaders are transforming the dance world

May – June 2022

Performance Enhancers

A new wave of leaders are transforming the dance world



DARRELL GRAND MOULTRIE

Choreographer and teacher

Born and raised in Harlem, the celebrated Darrell Grand Moultrie works across ballet, contemporary, and commercial dance genres with ease, winning multiple awards along the way. His latest crowd-pleasing piece, *Indestructible Light*, created in a pandemic bubble, was set to the recordings of Duke Ellington and performed by ABT on tour.



FRANCESCA HARPER

Artistic Director,
Ailey II, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

The dancer, choreographer, singer, actor, producer, teacher, director, and educator, as well as ballet consultant for the Oscar-winning *Black Swan*, became the artistic director of Ailey II eight months ago, following in the footsteps of her late mother, Denise Jefferson, who directed the Ailey School from 1984 until 2010. "It feels so much bigger than me," she has said of the appointment.



JANET ROLLÉ

CEO and Executive Director,
American Ballet Theater

The former manager of Beyoncé's business empire arrives at a uniquely challenging time following catastrophic losses of revenue during the pandemic, while ballet continues to struggle with attracting younger audiences. But Rollé has the business chops for the job, not to mention a lifelong passion for dance ever since her mother enrolled her in class when she was 8.



KYLE ABRAHAM

Choreographer and Artistic Director,
A.I.M. (Abraham in Motion)

The multi-award-winning artistic director of Abraham in Motion has been on fire recently, creating solo work for dancers such as ABT megastar Misty Copeland. His collaboration during the pandemic with NYCB, *When We Fell*, was feted by the *New York Times* as being "among the most beautiful dance films of the pandemic."

CAMILLE A. BROWN

Dancer, choreographer, educator, and founder,
Camille A. Brown & Dancers

The trailblazing Brown is used to scoring firsts: last fall the Guggenheim Fellow and five-time winner of the Princess Grace Award became the Metropolitan Opera's first Black director, codirecting and choreographing Terence Blanchard's opera *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. This spring she directs and choreographs the revival of Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf*, making her the first Black woman to both direct and choreograph a Broadway show in 65 years.



AESHA ASH

Associate Chair of Faculty, School of American Ballet

Since becoming the first Black female member of the permanent faculty of S.A.B. two years ago, the former student and New York City Ballet dancer has been an agent of change. In June she takes up the newly created position of associate chair, overseeing the relationship between faculty and students. "I have this hyper-awareness of that student who is shy in the corner and just needs someone to pull them out."





Dancers of Ailey II return after lengthy pandemic pause; "It's a homecoming for me," says artistic director

Francesca Harper

By: Dave Carlin

March 26, 2022



This segment aired on 3/26/22: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASl076pFEuQ> (2:34 minutes)

NEW YORK - The dancers of Ailey II are back on stage after a long pandemic pause.

The season returns with exciting new works and leader Francesca Harper, who tells CBS2's Dave Carlin she feels like she's just come home.

Carlin had an illuminating conversation with Harper, the renowned dancer, choreographer, singer and writer whose role now is artistic director of Ailey II. On Wednesday the season opened, and she took the stage to introduce her dancers. She has familiarity with Ailey dating back to her childhood. Her mother was a dancer and longtime educator at Ailey, and she counts as her mentors the legend Judith Jamison and Sylvia Waters. She talked about the new work she premiered for the company and how she hopes it brings people hope.

"It's a homecoming for me. It means so much. This is where I grew up, you know. To be asked, invited back to the Ailey building, into the Ailey family is just full circle," Harper said. "My job as the artistic director is to kind of sweep in and inspire." Harper praised the work ethic of the dancers.

"The Ailey II dancers - I never have to push any one of them, and they've been off for 18 months. And then coming back, and they're hungrier and more voracious than ever," Harper said. "They are so savvy and they are so educated I just have to give them morsels and they just fly." Harper explained some of her work.

"In my freedom series ... there's a trio for three women, and those are the three women, Sylvia Waters, Judith Jamison and my mother, and they just appeared in that work the three ladies here. Those are my examples," she said. Why?

"Because they paved the way for me," Harper said. "And also I think they really represent hope. It's been a challenging time for us but I really wanted to create a work, it's like, OK, our hope is always there with us, that we can carry it independently and collectively," Harper said. You may recognize Harper from Dance Theater of Harlem, Ballet Frankfurt, numerous Broadway shows, TV appearances.

The artistic director of Alvin Ailey's first, or main, company is Robert Battle, and he's celebrating 10 years in that role. The main Ailey company returns to the New York City stage this summer.



ALVIN AILEY II ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MAKES NEW YORK CITY DEBUT

By: Kemberly Richardson

March 23, 2022



This segment aired on 3/23/22: <https://abc7ny.com/amp/alvin-ailey-francesca-harper-ii-artistic-director/11675772/>
(2 minutes)

UPPER WEST SIDE, Manhattan (WABC) -- In celebration of Women's History Month, we highlight a trailblazer in the world of ballet who is now heading up the next generation of performers at a dance theater in New York City. Francesca Harper is making her New York City debut as the artistic director at Alvin Ailey II on Wednesday night.

Harper is following her mother, the late Denise Jefferson's footsteps. Her mother directed the Ailey school for roughly 26 years.

When Jefferson was a child dreaming of becoming a ballerina, a teacher pointed out that there were none of color, and she quit. She would later return to dance, but that story stuck with Harper.

"While I was studying at Ailey it was living in the back of my mind, like hmmm, what would this mean to kind of be a trailblazer in the ballet world," Harper said. She would go on to join the Frankfurt ballet.

Now in her new role, Harper cherishes guiding people like Brena Thompson who gave some advice for younger dancers. "Be open to no's, I've heard that a lot in my career, I'm just super open, super blessed," Thompson said.

Harper will pay tribute to her mother and showcase a mix of new material in her upcoming performances including Robert Battle's work 'Searchlight.' "We have that Ailey honoring of the soulful nature, but sometimes a little bit of an edge that makes you a little uncomfortable here, let me find my way," Harper said. Performances run now through April 3rd at the Ailey Citigroup Theater, a much anticipated homecoming.

Wednesday's woman

By Audrey J. Bernard

Francesca Harper is changing the trajectory of The Ailey II Company New York

Francesca Harper, internationally renowned performer, choreographer, director, and multi-disciplinary artist, has changed the trajectory of The Ailey II Company New York after being tapped by Robert Battle, Artistic Director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, to lead the renowned dance company in the 21st century. Harper assumed the duties of Artistic Director of Ailey II, the Ailey organization's acclaimed company of young dancers September 7, 2021, and immediately started preparing for Ailey II's return to the stage. Selected through a rigorous international search guided by Arts Consulting Group, Harper was chosen for the position by Battle and Bennett Rink, Executive Director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation.

Ailey II's 2021-2022 season kicked off in December with participation in Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's annual season at New York City Center, in which Ailey II performed in Mr. Ailey's classic *Memoria*, and continued with the company's own 2022 New York City season March 23-April 3 at The Ailey Citigroup Theater, as well as a U.S. tour.

Harper has choreographed works for both of the Ailey professional companies and Dance Theater of Harlem, Hubbard Street II, and La Bale Da Cidade, among others, as well as works commissioned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and her own The Francesca Harper Project; has been a principal dancer with Ballet Frankfurt and a featured performer in Broadway shows; has served as a consultant for major film and stage productions; and has extensive teaching experience, with posts at Juilliard, New York University, Barnard, and The Ailey School's joint BFA program with Fordham University. She is the daughter of the late Denise Jefferson, who directed The Ailey School from 1984 to 2010.

As Ailey II's Artistic Director, Harper will curate and oversee all aspects of the Company's artistic and educational initiatives while honoring the traditions, legacy, and creative spirit of Alvin Ailey. As an experienced performer and a mentor who has taught and choreographed over the past three decades at The Ailey School, where she was herself a student, she has the ideal outlook to lead young dancers across Ailey II's bridge from the classroom to the stage, sharing the broad spectrum of what it means to be a professional. Reporting to Ailey's

Artistic Director and Executive Director, she will collaborate with artists and administrators across the organization. Harper and the Ailey organization proudly named LaKey Evans-Peña as Rehearsal Director of the company. A former member of Ailey II herself, Evans-Peña has been serving as a teacher and advisor for The Ailey School and will continue in that role while taking up her new responsibilities with Ailey II.

Francesca Harper began her professional dance career with Dance Theater of Harlem, after having performed at the White House as a young Presidential Scholar in the Arts, and subsequently was a member of William Forsythe's Ballet Frankfurt (1991-1999), becoming a Principal Dancer in 1994. In Europe, she was chosen to perform with designers Issey Miyake and Gianni Versace and to perform in a film, *Dancing Pleats* that was a 30-year retrospective of Issey Miyake's design work in Japan. She also performed in Miyake's and Versace's fashion shows in Paris and Milan. Following a vocal performance in Frankfurt, she was invited to record her first single, *Slow Groove*, which was produced on a compilation album and distributed in Europe and the U.K. In 2006, she self-produced her own album, *Modo Fusion*, currently available on iTunes. Her first full evening of work as a choreographer, *Dark Violet Light Stone*, was commissioned by The Holland Dance Festival while she was still a member of Ballet Frankfurt.

Harper has performed in Broadway productions including *Fosse*, *All Shook Up*, and *The Color Purple*, and starred as Helene opposite Molly Ringwald in a national tour of *Sweet Charity* (2007) and in Judith Jamison's role in a revival of *Sophisticated Ladies* (2009). She also created her first play for the Cherry Lane Theater in New York, 50 minutes with Harriet and Phillis, produced by Anna Deavere Smith, with her aunt, Pulitzer Prize winning writer Margo Jefferson, and Paul Miller a.k.a DJ Spooky.

She debuted her critically acclaimed one woman show *The Look of Feeling* as a writer, actor, dancer, and vocalist in 2014 in New York City. She was invited to develop a new character for *Punchdrunk's Sleep No More*, jazz vocalist Cecilia Robertson, a.k.a. Ceci, as well as several other roles in the innovative, immersive production. In 2018, Harper was nominated for Best Actress in a Musical by Broadway.com for her role as Billie Holiday



Ailey II Artistic Director Francesca Harper (Photo by Nina Wurtzel)

in a production of *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*. 3 Her television appearances include *Boardwalk Empire*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. She also served as ballet consultant for the feature film *Black Swan* (2010), directed by Darren Aronofsky and starring Natalie Portman, who won an Oscar for her performance.

Harper was also a featured performer in *Zinnias – The Life of Clementine Hunter* directed by Robert Wilson, touring internationally with the production. She received a Living History Award in 2013 during Black History Month from Long Island University and the Innovation and Technology Award for her choreography for *Fashion Week* with designer Louis Vuitton. She is the writer, producer, composer, and narrator of the documentary film *To Lillian* (2021). Harper has choreographed works for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, Dance Theater of Harlem, Hubbard Street II, Tanz Graz, and many more companies, including her own The Francesca Harper Project, which she founded in 2005.

The Francesca Harper Project has performed at venues including La Biennale di Venezia, Holland Dance Festival, Harkness Dance Festival, The Colors Festival in Stuttgart, Central Park Summerstage, New York City Center, Har-

lem Stage, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and The Joyce Theater. Harper served as movement director for Nick Cave's *The Let Go*, commissioned by the Park Avenue Armory, which received a Bessie Award for Outstanding Production. Harper is a long-time artistic collaborator with MacArthur Foundation "genius award" visual artist Carrie Mae Weems, rock star Nona Hendryx, multimedia artist Carl Hancock Rux, and Margo Jefferson. Harper was awarded a two-year choreographic fellowship with Urban Bush Women, providing support toward her dance-theater work *An Unapologetic Body*, and a Fellowship at The Ballet Center at NYU. Recent engagements include serving as co-director and choreographer for the musical *Rose's War* and as movement director for Tommy Hilfiger and Zendaya for their fashion show at the Apollo Theater in fall 2019.

During quarantine, Harper was the creator and directorial consultant for 16 world premiere virtual films. Her latest works include a new creation for Wendy Whelan, Associate Artistic Director of New York City Ballet, and renowned poet Marc Bamuthi Joseph. Harper is currently engaged as Executive Producer with Sony Pictures on a series in development. As an educator, Harper has served as a Professor at The Juilliard

School, an adjunct professor at NYU, a former associate professor at Barnard College, and a professor in the Ailey/Fordham BFA program. She is currently pursuing an MFA in performance creation at Goddard College.

Renowned for merging the spirit and energy of the country's best young dance talent with the passion and creative vision of today's most outstanding emerging choreographers, Ailey II was founded in 1974 as the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble. Since then, Ailey II has flourished into one of the most popular modern dance companies, combining a rigorous touring schedule with extensive community outreach programs.

Harper recalls how her mother inspired and prepared her for this new appointment. "My mother, Denise Jefferson, was always my inspiration and mentor for teaching and giving back to the community. Through her work at The Ailey School she changed the landscape for young aspiring dance artists, including me, and was an unfailing example of courage and compassion," stated Harper. "I feel I grew up at The Ailey School, and now, having performed and choreographed around the world, it is profoundly moving to me to come home, accepting the great privilege of leading Ailey II." Harper comes full circle with this new position.

Francesca Harper named artistic director of Ailey II

By: Zita Allen

September 30, 2021



Ask Francesca Harper how she felt when Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Artistic Director Robert Battle announced her appointment as artistic director of Ailey II, that internationally renowned AAADT's acclaimed troupe of young talented dancers and she gushes with excitement declaring, "It's kind of surreal." Yet, in many ways the appointment seems a natural step in a rather remarkable career, as well as a promising beginning of a critically acclaimed dance company's next chapter, and last but not least, as a perfect example of the circle of life.

Harper's appointment opens the next chapter of Ailey II as it prepares for a much-anticipated return to live performances with the kickoff of its 2021-2022 season, beginning in December with participation in the AAADT's annual New York City Center season. The Ailey II dancers will join the AAADT for the performance of Ailey's classic "Memoria," the tribute to Ailey colleague, dancer and master teacher Joyce Trisler. Then without skipping a beat Ailey II kicks off a busy 2022 with its own New York season March 23-April 3 at the Ailey Citigroup Theater along with a U.S. Tour. (THE TOUR IS BEFORE AND AFTER THE U.S. SEASON)

During a recent interview, Harper's enthusiasm clearly communicated the energy of an artist ready to hit the ground running a quality the AAADT search committee must have found compelling after what AAADT Artistic Director Robert Battle said was, "an exhaustive international search done by a firm. We wanted to make sure we had a wide variety of people who we may not have thought of. There were so many great candidates but at the end of the day, we made the right choice for the right time. She came equipped."

In fact, so many aspects of Harper's biography makes this appointment feel like a homecoming. In fact, Battle mentioned that the multi-talented Harper not only trained at the Ailey School before embarking on an extraordinarily successful professional career in dance, but regularly returned to teach and choreograph. What's more, in addition to being "charismatic, caring and utterly brilliant," Battle noted, "She knew Mr. Ailey and drew inspiration as a dancer from Ms. Jamison. And her vision for Ailey II will not only bring fresh perspectives to Mr. Ailey's legacy, but also bring new voices to the stage and propel the Company forward. She is the perfect choice to lead Ailey II."

Ailey II is an artistically important part of the Ailey vision, says former Ailey dancer Sylvia Waters who served as that company's first artistic director for 38 years after Mr. Ailey entrusted her with this smaller troupe designed to serve, among other things, as "a performance vehicle for the gifted and talented dancers of the Ailey School to teach them what it was to be in a company." It's done such a successful job of training future dancers that many Ailey II dancers have gone on to join the main company, AAADT, and many choreographers whose works were presented by the second company have gone on to create dances on the first company.

Battle's excitement about the choice of Francesca Harper to head this important artistic entity is underscored by a resume that he and Bennett Rink, executive director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, found impressive to say the least. The multi-talented, multi-discipline Harper has had an impressive career as a dancer, choreographer, singer, actor, director, producer and teacher both in America and in Europe. She grew up surrounded by dance greats studying at the Ailey School, becoming a soloist with the Dance Theatre of Harlem under the direction of Arthur Mitchell, choreographed works for both of the Ailey professional companies and DTH, Hubbard Street II, and La Bale Da Cidade, among others, as well as works commissioned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and her own The Francesca Harper Project; has been a principal dancer with Ballet Frankfurt, under choreographer William Forsythe, and a featured performer in Broadway shows; has served as a consultant for major film and stage productions; and has extensive teaching experience, with posts at Juilliard, New York University, Barnard, and The Ailey School's joint BFA program with Fordham University. She is the daughter of the late Denise Jefferson, who directed The Ailey School from 1984 to 2010.

It is this last point, Harper says, that makes her appointment of Ailey II feel like life coming full circle.

“My mother, Denise Jefferson, was always my inspiration and mentor for teaching and giving back to the community. Through her work at The Ailey School she changed the landscape for young aspiring dance artists, including me, and was an unfailing example of courage and compassion. I feel I grew up at The Ailey School, and now, having performed and choreographed around the world, it is profoundly moving to me to come home, accepting the great privilege of leading Ailey II.”

Describing her reaction upon learning of her appointment, Harper says, “It just felt like everything was in alignment. “The moment that everything fell into place there was something that I was embodying,” she said recalling her as a little girl visiting her mother in her own office as head of The Ailey School. Fast forward to today, Harper said, “I thought about the moment that I’m there working in the building again and my daughter comes in to hang out with me and sees my mother’s picture on the 2nd floor and then I think about all we’ve been through and the movement we’ve all been through,” Harper says referring to both her family’s involvement in the early Civil Rights Movement and the current the Black Lives Matter movement and the heightened awareness of the need for diversity, equity and inclusion, for Blacks and for women, and the Ailey organization’s own legacy of art reflective of the cares and concerns of the world we inhabit. Harper says of her new appointment, “It feels so much bigger than me.”

Ms. Harper and the Ailey organization are also announced the appointment of Lakey Evans-Peña as rehearsal director of the company. A former member of Ailey II herself, Ms. Evans-Peña has been serving as a teacher and advisor for The Ailey School and will continue in that role while taking up her new responsibilities with Ailey II.

Renowned for merging the spirit and energy of the country’s best young dance talent with the passion and creative vision of today’s most outstanding emerging choreographers, Ailey II was founded in 1974 as the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble. Since then, Ailey II has flourished into one of the most popular modern dance companies, combining a rigorous touring schedule with extensive community outreach programs, a reputation that will only be enhanced by Harper’s appointment.