



INTERVIEW: Christopher Taylor on his Alvin Ailey journey back to Newark

By: John Soltes

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Christopher Taylor will soon perform at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, New Jersey, as part of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's annual season at the vaunted Garden State venue. For Taylor, the performance will be something of a homecoming because he's originally from Newark, and he actually started his dance career in AileyCamp Newark's summer program. He rose through the ranks, joining The Ailey School Junior Division, The Ailey School Professional Division and Ailey II, before making the jump (literally and figuratively) to the main company, according to his biography.

Each night of [the three-night residency](#) will have different programs, with New Jersey audiences having the chance to experience the local premieres of Kyle Abraham's *Are You in Your Feelings?* and Jamar Roberts' *In a Sentimental Mood*. Those newer works are paired with Ailey's *Revelations* on Friday, May 12 and Sunday, May 14, while the Saturday, May 13 performance features classics *Night Creature*, *Reflections in D* and *Revelations*, plus a new production of 1986's *Survivors*. There's also a special schools-only performance Friday afternoon. Recently *Hollywood Soapbox* exchanged emails with Taylor about his career with Ailey and what Newark audiences can expect from the Mother's Day weekend performances. Questions and answers have been slightly edited for style.

When did you first fall in love with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater?

It was when I first started dancing and saw a video about Alvin Ailey, his "blood memories" and the company. Teachers from Ailey and my dance teacher in middle school were educating my class about Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. When I saw Black bodies dancing the way they did, it was very inspirational. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to be a part of what I saw on the screen.

What are your memories of attending AileyCamp Newark? Was that a positive experience?

I remember reciting the affirmations every morning. As I've gotten older, I realized how important that was. I felt it was teaching us how saying positive affirmations can actually help a person be positive, take on challenges head on and so on. We were prepared to take on each day because we knew unexpected things may happen, but if we lead with our minds and hearts, things will be OK. Also, saying, "I am a winner!" is manifesting what you want to become, what you are. That's powerful. There was such a supportive community as well. Teachers were mentors; they created a space that was filled with love and encouragement. Because of that the campers felt encouraged to do the same. I'll never forget those precious years.

What are you looking forward to performing in your hometown at the legendary NJPAC with the Ailey Company?

I am looking forward to the student performance because I was once a kid in the audience watching Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater early in the morning. My mom and I also used to see Ailey at NJPAC on Mother's Day, so performing here with the company is such a full-circle moment. Furthermore, I performed at NJPAC in AileyCamp for many years. My roots are back home. I'm an example of a Newark native who had goals, and I accomplished them. This alone inspires people, and I know because I've been inspired by watching Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater as a kid. I'm honored and humbled to be able to perform for my city.

What dance are you most excited to perform on tour?

I love performing Alvin Ailey's famous piece *Revelations* because it's an interesting character development piece. There are so many different sections in *Revelations* that ask for different emotions and textures, so because of this, it's so enjoyable to do. Because of the thrill of the challenges in this piece, the space that *Revelations* creates for a performer is simply amazing.

As a performer, how do you rise above setbacks and obstacles?

I talk to myself. I remind myself that setbacks are teachable moments no matter how hard it is. I know that my whole being is part of what I'm doing, and that's what I can control. I can't soak and complain. I have to do the work and keep pushing. All you can do is your best. If you don't, you'll start to get into a space where the work isn't fun, and different internal emotions come about. If I have grace with myself, everything will fall into its place, also being aware that obstacles and setbacks will happen. Most of the battle is mental.