

THE ROOT

Fascinating Facts About Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*

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Dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey created nearly 80 ballets in his career, but none is as well-known and well-loved as *Revelations*. Ailey was only 29 when he created the masterpiece inspired by his experience growing up in church in the South. He used movement and music to tell a beautiful story of the despair, hope and joy of the Black experience. And it has been beloved by audiences for over 60 years.

As *Revelations* prepares to celebrate its 64th anniversary in January, here are a few fascinating facts about Alvin Ailey's work of art.

And don't miss your chance to see it for yourself. *Revelations* will be performed numerous times during Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's 65th Anniversary season, kicking off at New York City Center November 29-December 31, followed by a North American Tour, which runs January - May 2024.

Revelations is The Most Well-Known Piece of Modern Dance

Revelations debuted on January 31, 1960, in New York City. To date, it has been seen by over 23 million people in over 70 countries – making it the most recognized piece of modern dance of our time.

For Ailey, *Revelations* Was Personal

Ask anyone who has ever seen a performance of *Revelations*, and they'll tell you what a moving work of art it is. Alvin Ailey was beloved for his ability to tell the stories of Black people through dance. And one of the reasons audiences connect so deeply with this piece is because the story was so personal to the artist.

Born in Texas, where he lived until age 12, Alvin Ailey's roots are in the Southern church, a fact which comes through in his work. As a dancer and choreographer, he leaned into what he called his "blood memories," deeply personal recollections he carried with him from childhood.

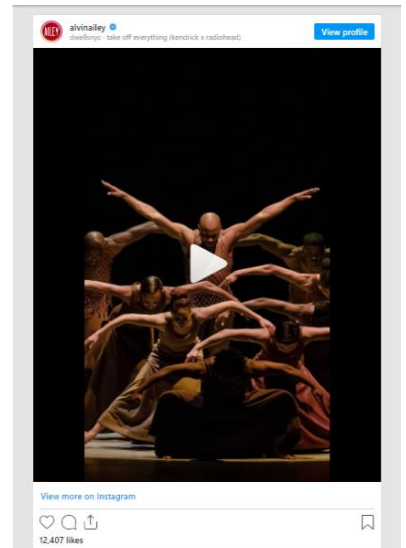
"I think that my best works are personal. The ones that endure seem to be the ones that come out of my gut," Ailey said in an interview. "The hardest ones that reveal some part of self."

Revelations is a Story of Faith

With *Revelations*, Ailey wanted to tell the story of African Americans' faith and the strength they've carried from slavery to freedom. The piece, choreographed in three parts, symbolizes different aspects of faith and worship.

Part 1 - "Pilgrim of Sorrow"

Former Ailey dancer and Artistic Director Emerita Judith Jamison calls the first section a representation of "the burden of life." The choreography, she adds, depicts how Black people have been weighed down by the world.



Throughout this section, the dancers reach upward with their fingers spread, representing Black people's search for hope and reaching for something they can only aspire to touch.

Part 2 - "Take Me to the Water"

For this section, Ailey drew from his early memories of watching baptisms in the lake near his church. In this portion of the piece, the dancers wear white, and their fluid movements suggest flowing water.

Part 3 - "Move, Members, Move"

The final section represents churchgoers gathering for worship. Ailey says he recalled childhood memories of ladies in church on Sunday morning wearing their Sunday best. In this section, dancers wear yellow, and the joyous music and movement represent the feeling of hope many Black people find in the church.

The Piece Has Inspired Other Artists

With *Revelations*, Alvin Ailey left us a true gift – something that is not lost on many of its famous fans.

"He took our everyday, and he gave us back beauty," actor Leslie Odom Jr. told theSkimm. "He gave us back fine art."

"Every American owes it to him or herself to see the Ailey [company] perform *Revelations*. It is an American phenomenon. I've probably seen it countless times and every time it's magical and spiritual and hopeful - everything that we want ourselves to be and hope that our country will be," said Oprah Winfrey.

"*Revelations*, I think forever, will continue to take cancers into places they didn't think they could journey to and take audiences with them," said Judith Jamison. "It embraces you no matter what religion you are [or] race, color, creed, anything, you sit and you watch that ballet, and then you know what it's like to be human."