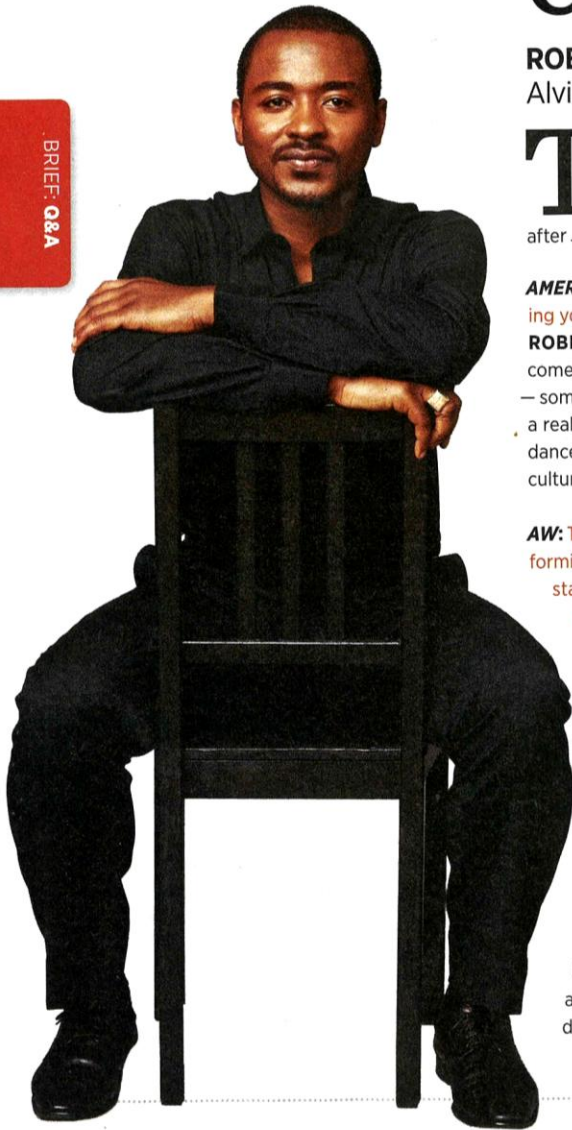


BRIEF: Q&A



Center Stage

ROBERT BATTLE steps into the spotlight as the new leader of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

THIS MONTH, ROBERT BATTLE TAKES THE REINS OF THE WORLD-FAMOUS ALVIN AILEY American Dance Theater. In so doing, he succeeds the legendary, Emmy Award-winning Judith Jamison to become only the third artistic director in the company's 53-year history, after Jamison and Alvin Ailey himself. *American Way* caught up with Battle to ask him about his new job.

AMERICAN WAY: What are your thoughts on taking your new position?

ROBERT BATTLE: For me, the first thing that comes to mind is that I've done something right — somewhere, somehow. I was chosen to continue a really great legacy that is much more than just dance steps, [one that] means a great deal to the cultural fabric of this country and to the world.

AW: This past season, when the company was performing in Miami, you were introduced from the stage as the artistic director designate. What did that mean to you?

RB: It meant a great deal ... More than anything, it meant that I could feel proud, because I had all the people around me who had invested in me and believed in me.

AW: You were a neglected baby who was raised in Miami's Liberty City, one of this country's worst slums, yet you rose to the top of the dance world. How did you do that?

RB: I don't know. I've always felt extremely blessed. I just think about family; my great-aunt and uncle took me in to be raised by their daughter, Dessie Williams, whom I consider

to be my mother. I was very fortunate in having people around me who believed in me and helped me. It took a village, in a sense.

AW: When did you know that you wanted to be a dancer?

RB: I'd always loved to dance around, but when I was about 12, I saw Alvin Ailey's "Revelations" (the company's signature piece that tells the story of the African-American experience) at the Jackie Gleason Theater, and that was when I really "got it."

AW: What do you see in yourself when you look in the mirror?

RB: Hope, tenacity, necessary fear and being secure in the fact that I'm where I'm supposed to be.

AW: Alvin Ailey is known for performing "Revelations" at most of its shows. Will you continue that tradition?

RB: Oh, yes; it's 50 years old, and it's never looked better. I don't feel the legacy of the company rests on "Revelations," but I know what it did for me as a young person of 12, so why would I rob a 12-year-old today of that opportunity to be inspired? We will continue to perform it as long as I am here.

Battle's Revelations

Ever since graduating from Juilliard, Robert Battle has kept busy, first as a dancer, then as a choreographer and eventually as head of his own modern dance company, Battleworks. But now, as head of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, he'll be touring not only around the country but also around the globe, making Battle a superbusy guy. Still, he's managed to find the time to pick up a few passions along the way, and he was more than willing to share a few with us.



Favorite dancer: That's hard to say. Alvin Ailey was a remarkable dancer. Some people aren't aware of that, but he was brilliant. Judith Jamison was iconic. Rudolf Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. I could go on and on, depending on the era.

Favorite designer: I can look pretty good in Hugo Boss. **Favorite singer:** Sarah Vaughan. My mother used to play her records when I was a kid. **Favorite museum:** American Museum of Natural History in New York. I love anything involving history. **Favorite author:** Maya Angelou.

Favorite musician: Wynton Marsalis. **Favorite actor:** Sidney Poitier. **Favorite city:** New York.

Favorite dish: Well, I like sushi, and I like ribs, but, between the two, I have to say I love a good rib.

