

## 'Dance: Legends and legacies' Robert Battle's inaugural season as Ailey's artistic director

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By Charmaine Patricia Warren



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Linda Celeste Sims and Antonio Douthit in Paul Taylor's "Arden Court." Andrew Eccles photo.

Our dance community and dance history are incredibly rich; those who have achieved the highest levels of success in this often difficult discipline deserve considerable attention. This series, "Dance: Legends and legacies," is presented with our dance icons and their legacies in mind.

A series of questions have been developed about our legends and their chosen legacies. We hope to either introduce or remind our readers about who they are, what they have done and what they continue to do to maintain the continuum we call the Black tradition in dance.

This fourth article in the series celebrates Alvin Ailey's legacy with Judith Jamison, artistic director emerita; Robert Battle, artistic director, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT); Tracy Inman, co-director (with Melanie Person) of the Ailey School; Troy Powell, artistic director designate (who will follow Sylvia Waters as artistic director; Waters will retire in June 2012); and Demitia Hopkins, AAADT company member.

For the series, the "legend" generally chooses the "legacy"; however, as Jamison said, "All of the people who work here, that's my legacy-the legacy is something bigger than one person." (For our original interview with Jamison, see the June 24, 2010, issue of the Amsterdam News.)

**Amsterdam News:** Do you consider Alvin Ailey and Judith Jamison legends?

**Battle:** Ailey in what he has accomplished and Judith because of the impact she has on people.

**Inman:** Yes, because of what they have done for dance overall.

**Powell:** They set many platforms for the next generation.

**Hopkins:** They changed the face of modern dance.

**Have they made an imprint on your work via their life's work?**

**Battle:** Yes! The images of Jamison as being tall, "Revelations" reflects so much. Mr. Ailey saw that in her, and it made me stand more erect. Now, at the helm, this lineage is a testimony of how and when someone uses their light to illuminate all of us.

**Inman:** They elevated dance as a dignified art form, established one of the finest institutions and continue to bring viable artists to the forefront. Battle brings a new energy, and I'm looking forward to developing this relationship.

**Powell:** They instilled the importance of learning, listening and watching.

**Hopkins:** I'm just getting to know Mr. Battle, but in rehearsing his "Takademe" he is precise but then sends you on your way.

**How does race figure into your dance life?**

**Battle:** Ailey offered us possibilities-he named the company Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and audiences responded. The only thing that would hold me back is my own lack of imagination.

**Inman:** The world Mr. Ailey created confirmed that the color of your skin does not determine your ability to grasp the dance or culture of a people.

**Powell:** Mr. Ailey began the company to celebrate our culture-we are exposing others to our heritage through dance.

**Hopkins:** I used to think so, but not anymore. Mr. Battle is helping to broadening the horizon.



**What do you believe your place in dance is today and into the future?**

**Battle:** Mr. Ailey envisioned a place for choreographers to speak their minds. This has always been in my DNA. Today, I can look into the faces of the nine new dancers who have worked so hard for this dream job and I can pay it forward; I can help to expand on what is already there.

**Inman:** I have a good foundation that I will build on without losing sight of where I came from.

**Powell:** My job is to keep this tradition strong.

**Hopkins:** I am still figuring out what I can give, but I'm looking forward to my second season.



This season, which promises to "reach back into Ailey traditions and stretch out in new directions," marks Battle's inaugural season as artistic director. Battle is bringing back Ailey's first full-length work without a plot, "Streams" (1970), to show "how versatile a choreographer [Ailey] was." He is also presenting Joyce Trisler's meditative female solo, "Journey" (1958), to honor Trisler, a dear friend and colleague of Ailey's.

Battle is also introducing AAADT to his mentor and an American master choreographer, Paul Taylor, through Taylor's "Arden Court" (1981). He explained he is doing so because he "wants the dancers to have new challenges."

Battle is equally proud of the new direction for the company, which includes the premiere of hip-hop choreographer Rennie Harris' "Home" and American-Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin's "Minus 16" (1999). He doesn't mind being in the same league as Harris and Naharin, who are sometimes called bad boys, because they are "passionate people...who love [their] work. [After all], the cornerstone of AAADT is passion and humanity."



Also on this season's calendar is Battle's "Takademe" (1999), made in his tiny apartment, which will now be performed to live music. His excitement is palpable. "Oh yeah," he offered, "I've always wanted to see that happen...now it can."

Other season highlights include: Jamison's "Forgotten Time"; "Love Stories," by Jamison with Battle and Harris; Ailey's "Cry"; the unforgettable "Revelations"; and more. The opening night gala boasts honorary chairs first lady Michelle Obama; the model Iman; singer John Legend with Alicia Graf Mack in "If It's Magic," by Jamison; Taylor's "Arden Court"; Lar Lubovitch's "Prelude to a Kiss"; and "Revelations" with 50 dancers.

AAADT runs Nov. 30-Jan. 1, 2012, at New York City Center. For more information, call (212) 581-1212 or visit [www.alvinailey.org](http://www.alvinailey.org).