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Battle named artistic director designee of Alvin Ailey

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It is truly official! Last Sunday, May 2, Judith Jamison, artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT), took Artistic Direc-



Robert Battle (seated) and AAADT's S. DeShauteurs in rehearsals for Battle's "Juba"

tor Designate Robert Battle to the Abyssinian Baptist Church, where Reverend

Calvin Butts and the congregation welcomed him.

"Robert was my first choice," Jamison said adamantly. "His name came out of [Masazumi] Chaya's [associate artistic director of AAADT] and my mouth at the same time....The board endorsed the decision."

It was only two years ago that Jamison announced that she would step down as artistic director, but would remain in the position for three years until a replacement was found. Back then, Jamison said, "It is now time for me to pass on the great gift that I have held, making sure that the next hands to receive it are strong and capable."

Today, Jamison affirmed, "Robert is savvy. He knows the company, he is approachable, acceptable, eclectic. He loves the idea of running the most prestigious company...and he means a great deal to us."

Battle, a 37-year-old native of Miami, Florida, is a graduate



Robert Battle (Brian Guillaux photo)

of the World School of the Arts and the Julliard School. Certainly not a stranger to the Ailey family, while at Julliard, Battle spent many summers studying at The Ailey School, being nurtured by faculty members, including Denise Jefferson (school director), whose office he would sit in while waiting his turn to ask her advice. After graduating from Julliard, Bat-

tle went on to dance with Parsons Dance Company (1994–2001), where he began making works in 1998.

Sylvia Waters, artistic director of Ailey II, recalls the young Julliard graduate who one day said to her, "By the way, I have some videos I'd like you to see." Battle would go on to choreograph "Moon Indigo" (1999) for Ailey II.

Waters added, "'Moon Indigo' was so wonderful that Parsons put it on his company."

In 2001, Battle began his own company, Battleworks, and was sought after as a choreographer.

"The field embraced him," said Waters. "Juba" (2003) was the first work he made for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. "Love Stories" (2005), a collaboration with Jamison and Rennie Harris followed, and just last year, he made the critically acclaimed male solo "In/Side."

Now, just one week after the

official appointment, it hasn't all sunk in yet, no indeed. Battle said it's been a whirlwind, and he wakes up in the morning asking, "Is that me?"

As he tests these new



AAADT's Artistic Director Judith Jamison and Robert Battle, artistic director designate

(Paul Kolnick photo)

waters, Battle walks through the halls of The Ailey School, which is always bustling with

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Battle

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classes and conversations, and “sees a reflection of himself as a young student with hope in [his] heart” because his dream has been realized. Reminiscing about how lucky he was to have had good teachers who he calls on today, he added, “I know the power of that exchange.”

He has met with the stu-

dents, staff and other Ailey family members, and there has been an outpouring of support, “human support, not just efficient support,” he stated.

Already described as a fresh voice, Battle is admittedly very excited for the opportunity to add his voice to the Ailey Foundation. He believes in what the company and the school stand for. As such, Battle looks forward to working side by side with Jamison for one year

before she takes on emerita status in July of 2011.

“This is a lady who is quite powerful,” he said. “I will learn from her guidance and from experience. And like my grandfather taught me, I’ll be listening and watching.”

Waters noted this is a “natural consequence of [Battle’s] journey, and it will all coalesce.”

Jamison agrees, imparting that his appointment was “God directed.”
