

May 18, 2009

# Alvin Ailey dance tour marks 50 years

By Andrew Adler  
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When the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performs at the Kentucky Center on Tuesday, May 19, and Wednesday, May 20, keep an eye on Matthew Rushing. He's the old man of the company — at the advanced age of 35.

Rushing has danced with the celebrated Ailey troupe since he was 17, emerging from Los Angeles to soon move to New York and gain quick notice as a substantial talent. In a single season, he graduated from the Ailey's junior company to the main ensemble, with which he's traveled the nation — and much of the world — spreading the gospel of Ailey's potent dance vision.

The company has spent this season celebrating its 50th anniversary, with this week's Whitney Hall performances coming near the end of an exhausting tour.

"It definitely takes a toll on a dancer's body, mind and spirit," Rushing acknowledged during a recent phone interview. "But

the whole touring aspect is such a huge part of the Ailey company, you definitely have to be open to it."

Ailey, who died in 1989 at age 58, established the company as an unprecedented fusion of classical ballet and African-American cultural sensibility. Through such works as "Cry" and particularly "Revelations" (the latter of which will be danced on both evenings here), he built a formidable repertory encompassing but not wedded to any single style.

Since his death, the troupe has been directed by Judith Jamison, his most acclaimed dancer (who helped make the solo "Cry" an enduring sensation). And while Ailey's works continue to anchor the company's repertoire, a growing number of important choreographers have created pieces for the Ailey dancers.

One of the most recent of these is Mauro Bigonzetti's "Festa Barocca," a 45-minute work set to the music of Handel that the company will perform Wednesday, May 20. Other scheduled pieces are "Blues Suite" and "Suite Otis" (set to songs by Otis Redding) on Tuesday, May 19, plus "Solo" the following night.

Rushing will be a prominent presence on both evenings. Although a product of the West Coast, he is now a New Yorker. "Growing up, I had nothing to compare L.A. to, but I just knew I didn't like it," he says. "I felt I wanted to be connected to more of a performing-arts culture, and I didn't feel that in L.A."

The rigors of life on the road, which are debilitating for many dancers, serve to balance Rushing's hectic career.

"There is a special rhythm of the tour I'm used to," he explained. "There's a point where I get fed up with New York, and usually about that time it's time for us to go on tour. Then there's a time when I miss the hustle and bustle of New York, and it's time to come back."

Rushing said he relishes the opportunity to perform works by a diverse mix of choreographers. "The dancer is very chameleon-like," he said. When a choreographer comes in, we have to try to take (on) his vision, and do the best we can possibly be to manifest that vision."

That is the ongoing reality of life in this troupe.

"As a dancer in the Ailey company," Rushing said, "you get used to changing your hats very quickly."

Reporter Andrew Adler can be reached at (502) 582-4668.



Matthew Rushing performed in "Festa Barocca." Courtesy of Nan Melville

When: Tuesday, May 19, and Wednesday, May 20, at 7:30 p.m. Where: Whitney Hall, Kentucky Center, Sixth and Main streets Tickets: \$25-\$60. Information: Call the Kentucky Center box office at (502) 584-7777, or toll-free at (800) 775-7777, or go to [www.kentuckycenter.org](http://www.kentuckycenter.org).

## Additional Facts

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