

Stepping into the dance

Alvin Ailey's artistic director will bring in edgier productions

BY MIRIAM KREININ SOUCCAR

Robert Battle, the new artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, officially takes the reins on July 1. The 38-year-old Juilliard-educated choreographer assumes control from Judith Jamison, making him only the second

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Robert Battle

person in this job besides Mr. Ailey himself. Now on tour with the Ailey troupe in Russia, the choreographer recently announced his first season for the storied company. He plans to bring in edgier productions, like dances infused with hip-hop. At the same time, he will maintain its tradition of featuring landmark works created by Mr. Ailey.

Why is it important to bring in different genres of dance?
One of the bedrocks of the compa-

ny is the versatility of the dancers, so I want to continue to stretch them to be able to tackle most anything. It challenges the audience and keeps them on their toes, no pun intended, but also challenges my dancers, and continues to give them food for thought. That makes the experience on stage very real.

You are starting a "choreographers in residence" program. What do you hope to achieve?

As a choreographer who has had to scrape and claw to get studio space, trying to make work on the go is a very difficult thing. I'm interested in trying to nurture the next generation.

What does this job mean to you?

I've been in a whirlwind of emotions. Everything from being naturally nervous, being completely excited, to every now and then looking in the mir-

ror and saying, "Is this really me?" I remember being that 12-year-old boy from Miami who was bused from my school to see Alvin Ailey for the first time and being in awe. Now I have the opportunity to make sure the company stays aloft so that some other young person can have that transformative experience.

The board did a two-year search. Why do you think they chose you?

I can only say some of the things Ms. Jamison has said. The biggest compliment is that in some ways, I remind her of Mr. Ailey. In terms of [Mr. Ailey's] generosity of spirit and that I know the joy and the power of dance.

Do you still dance?

No. You're most likely to see me playing the piano in a studio when it's empty. That's where my creative outlet is. To stay in shape now, I just get on the treadmill. I need something mindless that I can tackle. ■

