

Dance career a dream come true for suburban native

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By Scott Morgan

Alvin Ailey's classic dance piece "Revelations" concludes each performance of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Chicago engagement at the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University from Wednesday, April 11, to Sunday, April 15.

Dancer Sarah Daley is living her dream as a new member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the 54-year-old modern dance company world-famous for celebrating African-American culture.

Dancing with the Alvin Ailey company is something that Daley — a former resident of South Elgin and Bartlett, among other places — planned for at an early age.

"I started to think about it when I was in middle school, and that's when I first saw the (Alvin Ailey) company at the Auditorium Theatre," Daley said during a telephone interview from Detroit. "From then on every year they would come to Chicago and I would go to see them. I really wanted to be a part of the company."

Now she is, and she'll be dancing in the same theater she attended as a child when the company returns to Chicago for two repertory dance programs at the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University from Wednesday, April 11, to Sunday, April 15.

As a teenager, Daley's main dance focus was on classical ballet, training with the Faubourg School of Ballet in Hanover Park and going on to compete in that discipline for the 2002 and 2003 Youth America Grand Prix dance competition.

Daley's strategic planning is documented in a 2005 Daily Herald article tied to her past Schaumburg appearances in a double bill of Faubourg Ballet's "Esther" and "Paquita."

Back then, Daley said that she had enrolled at Fordham University in New York City because it "is affiliated with the Alvin Ailey School of dance ... I love their style of dance, and want to be in the Alvin Ailey company."

When reminded of her comments back in 2005, Daley was amazed at how far and fast she has come with her dance career, first joining the smaller Ailey II company in 2009 right after graduating from Fordham, before ultimately being promoted to the main company in 2011.

"It is kind of shocking," Daley said. "I wasn't thinking that I would get to Ailey until I had more experience in the dance world."

Watmora Casey, the artistic director of Faubourg Ballet who has known Daley since she was 7, is not at all surprised that she made it into the Alvin Ailey company.

"Even though (Daley) was one of our top classical dancers and could have gone to any other classical company, she chose that company because the movements appealed to her," said Casey, who himself had trained with the Alvin Ailey company earlier in his dance career. "It's an honor and a great privilege to meet a young lady like



that who had something in her mind and continued on that journey and is actually living her dream. It's very rare that you find that.”

Daley is part of the Alvin Ailey company at a pivotal time, especially since choreographer Robert Battle has taken over the artistic directorship from the legendary Ailey dancer and longtime artistic director Judith Jameson.

“There's definitely change in the air. (Battle) is so great about preserving history and what (past artistic directors Judith Jameson and Alvin Ailey) accomplished, but we also have a great mix of new things with his choreography and other choreographers,” Daley said.

She notes that the company is dancing “Arden Court,” its first work by American choreographer Paul Taylor, and the recently commissioned work “Home” by hip hop choreographer Rennie Harris, which is about people living with HIV/AIDS.

For the upcoming Chicago engagement, Daley is excited see her family again, and to meet with Casey and his current Faubourg dance students. The significance of Ailey's Chicago performance venue and her career goals is not lost on Daley.

“I haven't been to the Auditorium Theatre to see Alvin Ailey since I left for college,” Daley said. “This will be the first time I'm back there, but this time I'll be a performer.”