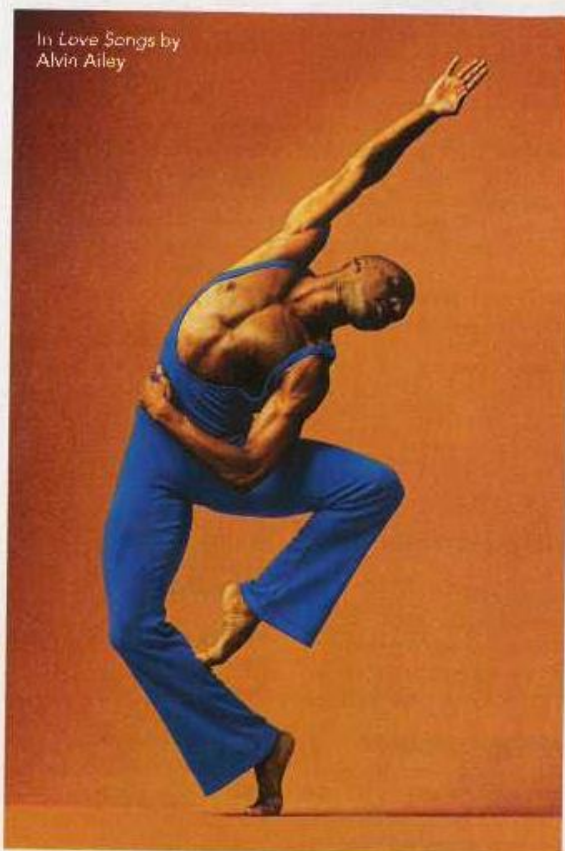


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fromtheheart | WHY I DANCE



In Love Songs by
Alvin Ailey

Watching Matthew Rushing in Rennie Harris' *Home*, the phrase "born to dance" may pop into your head. The combination of naturalness, spirituality, and deep body awareness makes it seem like he is springing from the earth with each step. In Ailey's *Revelations*, his spine ripples like the metaphorical water he's wading in. As Charmaine Patricia Warren wrote in these pages when Rushing was named a 2010 Dance Magazine Award recipient, he is "illuminated by an inner light."

After graduating from Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, Rushing went on to The Ailey School (on full scholarship) and joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1992. His vast repertoire included works by Judith Jamison, Ronald K. Brown, Alonzo King, Garth Fagan, Donald McKayle, Robert Battle, and Jerome Robbins. He has also choreographed for the company. And in 2010 he became rehearsal director while still performing with the company as a guest artist.

by Matthew Rushing

In the midst of new chapters beginning and old ones ending in my career, I couldn't think of a more appropriate question to ask myself than why I dance. The last couple of years have been extremely challenging emotionally and physically. Having to adjust to a management position while maintaining my body as a dancer at 38 is no joke! Though I hold this position with immense gratitude, I often find myself struggling to keep afloat. The struggle mainly comes from the standard of excellence that I hold for myself and that is inherent in the Ailey organization. In order to keep my head above water, I constantly remind myself that these things take time (smile).

In my search for the answer to why I dance, my mind started to drift over my time with the company: the opportunity to travel the world, working with renowned choreographers, dancing for four presidents, enduring 14-week national tours, being involved in outreach in places like South Africa, Denmark, and China, and yes, even receiving a 2010 Dance Magazine Award (bigger smile). While contemplating these awesome experiences I suddenly thought of a brief scripture: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Let me explain. I equate "being first" with being my very best—reaching that high standard I set for myself. I see "being very last" as putting others before me, whether it be in trying to help a dancer improve their craft, or giving my all as an artist. These things call for a sense of selflessness. Don't get me wrong, I don't dance out of obligation, I dance out of an overwhelming feeling of necessity. Dance is literally a form of life to me, and I can't imagine functioning without it!

In the beginning of my career, dance was all about me. I wanted to turn more, get my legs higher, and wow the crowd. Now dance has become terribly simple; instead of wowing the crowd, I make myself available for life to be shared through my God-given gift. I've noticed being a dancing servant removes the pressure of pleasing people and adds the pressure of being valuable. People who have a positive impact on lives through their art are valuable. My tool of impact is my gift of dance, and I take great joy in using this tool in my service as a dancer. Service is not always a walk in the park; I've noticed that my tool loses its impact with the presence of issues like insecurities, self-doubt, jealousy, and ego. The second I allow these toxins to get into my system I jeopardize my value. At this point I have to remind myself to take the attention off of me and refocus it back on service...on why I dance. When I return to this perspective it makes dancing so much more enjoyable. It takes away the drudgery of doing yet another tendu and breathes life into roles that I have been performing for more than two decades!

Having the opportunity to live in what you were created to do is priceless; being able to positively affect people all over the world as well as your peers holds great value. Knowing that I am on a path to my best me is extremely encouraging... this is why I dance. ■