

July 2012

## PASSING THE TORCH

At the opening night of Ailey II's New York season in April, the last under **Sylvia Waters'** direction, the house was full of tears, cheers, and—before any dancing had even occurred—a standing ovation.

To many dance artists, just saying the name Sylvia Waters means love in a big way. Both Alvin Ailey and Judith Jamison sought her out as a confidante, and like them, she has had a significant impact on countless dancers. On July 1, Troy Powell, mentored by Waters for 20-plus years, will succeed her as artistic director of Ailey II. Imprinted into her 38-year tenure is her nurturing, encouraging way of molding young dancers into well-rounded artists.

A New Yorker, Waters began studying modern dance in junior high, trained at the New Dance Group, and graduated from Juilliard. She danced with Donald McKayle's company, on a European tour of Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity*, and in Maurice Béjart's company Ballet of the 20th Century. She performed with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from 1968 until 1975, when Ailey asked her to direct the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, later renamed Ailey II.

A Dance Magazine Award recipient in 2008, Waters had a hand in the careers of Ailey's current artistic director, Robert Battle, whom she invited to set a work on Ailey II back in 1999; Matthew Rushing, Ailey rehearsal director;

and Tracy Inman, former Ailey dancer and co-director of The Ailey School. Some others who have been helped by Waters are Ronald K. Brown, Shen Wei, Jessica Lang, and Kyle Abraham.

Following her retirement from Ailey II, Waters will conduct the new Ailey Legacy Residency for college students and lend her expertise to Battle's New Directions Choreography Lab. And, ever the mentor, she will make time to stop by Ailey II rehearsals.

—*Charmaine Patricia Warren*



Sylvia Waters