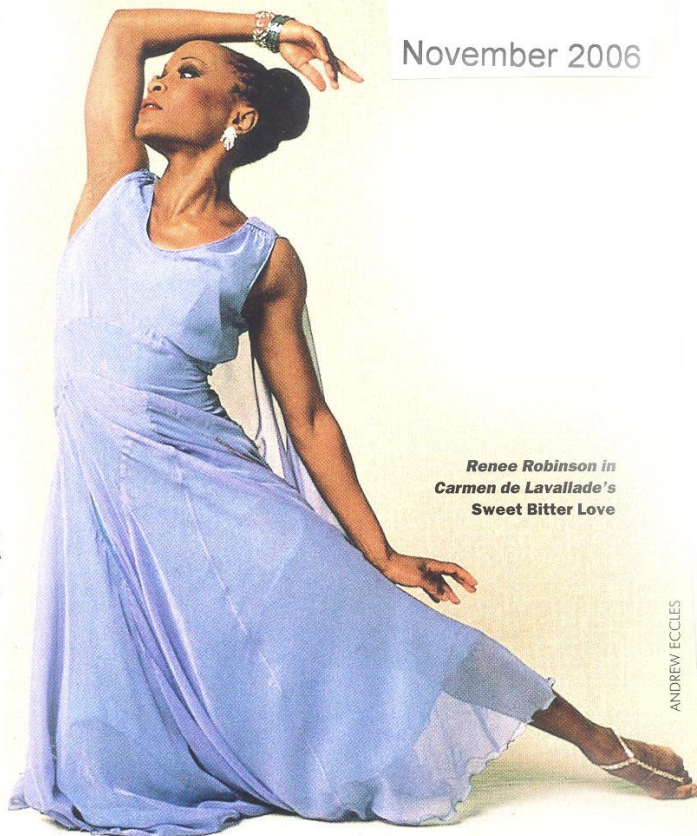


PRO PORTRAIT

November 2006

Ailey Baby

Renee Robinson celebrates her 25th anniversary with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater this month. **By Lisa Arnett**



Renee Robinson in Carmen de Lavallade's Sweet Bitter Love

ANDREW ECCLES

EXCELLING AT AILEY

Switching It Up: The summer after her first, and only, year at New York University (she studied dance and economics), Robinson auditioned for The Ailey School's summer program. She was offered a full scholarship to attend and was later asked to join the school's workshop company (no longer in operation). She has been with the institution ever since.

Try, Try Again: Following a year in the workshop company, Robinson joined Ailey II, and after one year, tried out for AAADT but didn't make it. "The teachers were like, 'What happened? [Mr. Ailey] likes you,'" Robinson recalls. "[It turned out that] I was very shy in the audition," she says. Robinson got into the main company the following year, 1981.

COMPANY LIFE

Carrying the Legacy: Today, Robinson remains the only dancer in AAADT selected to join the company by Alvin Ailey himself.

On Mr. Ailey: "I remember him talking to the seasoned dancers . . . reminding them that they had to go out and learn about life; that way, the audience would be able to identify with them."

Crosstraining Tactics: Jogging, bicycling, strength training, Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis, and Zena Rommett's Floor Barre Technique, which she is certified to teach.

"[Alvin Ailey] was adamant about you being good at technique and if you did not do well, he told you."

—Renee Robinson

Background Basics

NAME: Renee Robinson

BORN IN: Washington, DC

EARLY TRAINING: Ballet from age 10 through high school at DC's Jones-Haywood School of Ballet, where she danced with Capitol Ballet Company. Summer programs at the School of American Ballet and Dance Theater of Harlem.

ONSTAGE NOW: AAADT begins its 48th season (November 29th–December 31st) at City Center, in NYC. For tickets: alvinailey.org or nycitycenter.org.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Embarrassing Times: Early in her career, during the company's tours to France and Italy, Robinson discovered that hot days and cool nights result in condensation and slippery outdoor stages. "I remember being confused as to why I was falling and no one else was, but it was because they had learned to dance under those circumstances. Mr. Ailey said to someone, 'That new dancer has got to stop falling. I know that the stage is slippery, but she really has to figure out a way.'"

Revisiting Repertory: "Being in the company this long, ballets have come [in and out] of the rep, and I've experienced them [as] someone who's more mature, someone who knows more about life. Sometimes the dancers will say to me, 'Aren't you tired of doing this role?' But I think revisiting a ballet is undervalued." **DS**