



What does it take to be an “Ailey” dancer?

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By Daniel Harder

That is the question that I keep asking myself as I continue on this new journey as a member of the Ailey Company. The first words that come to my mind when I think of an Ailey dancer are “powerful” and “athletic.” It’s no secret that the dancers in the Ailey Company have an energy and force unique to themselves. It’s something that I am learning how to tap into more and more every day. However, there is another characteristic of the Ailey dancers that I feel is one of the most important (even though sometimes it’s overlooked)... their artistic honesty and freedom. Some of the greatest Ailey dancers I can think of (Dudley Williams, Sarita Allen, Gary DeLoatch, and Donna Wood, just to name a few) were storytellers. They were so free onstage and able to communicate a truth all of their own.

Recently, I had rehearsal with our artistic director, Ms. Judith Jamison, for the iconic Ailey ballet Revelations. We (the Company) were working with her on the opening section of the piece entitled “I Been ‘Buked.” As the rehearsal began, Ms. Jamison took the time to work with us on the movement; the clarity of the shapes, the timing of each person’s part, and how the piece should move throughout the space. Yet, what stood out most to me was when Ms. Jamison shared with us the intent behind the movement and how to make it true to ourselves as we dance it. She spoke of a deep connection with the earth and the sense of communal introspection that we should have as we move as one.

She made it very clear. Dancing is more than just doing steps. I mean, I know Ms. Jamison wants the steps done correctly, I don’t doubt that at all :-). But, I also feel she wants us to allow ourselves to connect and convey our truths honestly with the audience, so in turn, they can see a reflection of themselves onstage.

So, with that in mind... I’ve been having a lot of fun, as I continue to take that idea and explore myself with every ballet I am learning. Right now, we are continuing to work with Christopher L. Huggins on his new ballet Anointed, as well as the other repertory we will be taking on the road this Fall. The start of the international tour is less than two weeks away and the excitement inside of me continues to grow more and more daily. I think the audience is really going to enjoy the repertory we are bringing with us on tour.... There’s definitely something for everyone. And of course, there will be the “power, athleticism, grace, and artistic honesty” of my wonderful colleagues.

Well, it’s time to prepare for tomorrow’s rehearsals. Even as I write this, I realize that discovering what makes me an “Ailey” dancer won’t happen overnight. Yet, little by little every day, I am looking forward to finding more and more freedom with every step and tapping into something greater than myself. Tomorrow will be another chance that I have to dig deeper and push myself even further.

The exploration continues... stay tuned! :-)