

Waterford Twp. native graces local stage with Alvin Ailey troupe

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By Ursula Watson

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater returns to the Detroit Opera House this weekend to perform new, cutting-edge pieces such as hip-hop choreographer Rennie Harris' "Home" and the perennial favorite "Revelations."

Also returning is Waterford Township native Megan Jakel, who joined the company in 2009. Jakel says her love of dance was cultivated early on, thanks to a little help from her parents, of course.

"When I was 3, almost 4, my mother and father enrolled me in local ballet classes," says Jakel. "I fell in love with it."

While her affection for ballet remained constant, she soon found a place in her heart for other dance disciplines, such as jazz and tap.

"I knew I wanted to be a professional dancer," she says. "I was really lucky that I figured it out early and had a lot of time to focus on what I wanted."

During her senior year at Waterford Mott High School, her dance dreams took her to California where she spent a year dancing with the City Ballet of San Diego.

In 2005, Jakel was an apprentice and rehearsal director for the Francesca Harper Project in New York and she went on to graduate with honors in 2007 from the Ailey/Fordham B.F.A. Program in Dance. Prior to joining the company, she was a member of Ailey II.

"When I was growing up, I always heard the name Alvin Ailey, but it wasn't until I got to witness (the troupe) firsthand at the school that I gained an extreme appreciation," says Jakel. "It is really a beautiful and multicultural organization."

Founded in 1958 by dance pioneer Alvin Ailey, the company now has a new artistic director, Robert Battle, who took over the position from famed dancer/director Judith Jamison last year.

"This is a special season because (Battle) has pulled out all the stops and has such a brilliant vision for our future," say Jakel. "It is just a very exciting time for the company."

The company's Detroit run, which includes the new work "Home," is set to a score of gospel and house music. The piece is inspired by stories submitted by people living with or affected by HIV. Additionally, the company will also perform Paul Taylor's classic 1981 work "Arden Court," which features a baroque score by William Boyce.

During her downtime at home, Jakel says it will be all about reconnecting with family and friends. But taking the stage in her home state is a rare treat that she relishes.

"It is always exciting to perform in Detroit and have my friends and family to see me perform," she says.



Megan Jakel of Waterford Township says performing on stage in Detroit is a rare treat. (Andrew Eccles)