

Kirven Boyd



Memory and family: The 'new' era of Alvin Ailey

By DANIELLE DEADWYLER

Childhood memories can whirl just as dancers do, undulating or striking like ocean waves we miss but long to be part of again. Dancers make indelible impressions on children, even if the child never wants to be a dancer. Young fans can recall every detail of their first exposure: the house lights dimming, their favorite piece, how old they were, what they wore. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has had that affect on people ever since its namesake and a few friends opened eyes at New York's 92nd Street Y in 1958.

Kirven Boyd, who has progressed from the education department, to the junior company Ailey II, to the main company in his 8-year-old Ailey career, was a high school freshman in 1998 when he first saw the modern-dance company. It calls it the "life-changing experience" that sparked his career.

Alicia Mack was 11 when she saw Ailey perform "Night Creature," "Memoria" and other pieces on a VHS tape. She majored in history at New York's Columbia University and studied nonprofit management in graduate school, but dance never let her go. She's in her fourth season with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Continued on page 50

ANDREW ECCLES

Continued from page 14

The company's visits have become a post-holiday ritual in Atlanta as, over the years, dancers like Boyd and Mack continue to impress audiences of all ages. This year's engagement, the first under new artistic director Robert Battle, comprises premieres, new productions and new directions. "This is the beginning of a new adventure — for the company, for me and for our audiences in Atlanta," he says.

pretty much all day long — rehearsing, taking class and performing onstage, often beginning as early as 1 p.m.

The work ethic of dancers is extensive, as their schedule proves. It's often augmented by a favorite workout. Boyd, for example, likes to go to the gym, is always stretching and always taking class.

He calls the repertory "very man-heavy" in its physical demands. "You definitely have to be a strong dancer, a

strong person, a strong artist to be an Ailey man."

That strength was called upon often in 2011, as Battle succeeded longtime artistic director Judith Jamison and nine

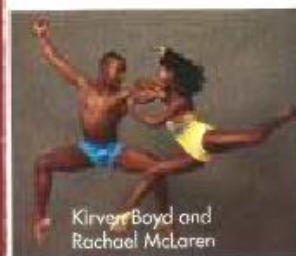
new dancers were hired. Mack, who knows Battle through work with his Battleworks Dance Company, called the transition seamless.

"The integrity of the work is still the same," the new artistic director says of the Ailey way. "You always know what's expected of you as a dancer."

So while much has changed, much is the same. This Ailey tour carries with it the legacy that began in that New York Y so many years ago. ■

Danielle Deadwyler is an Atlanta-based writer, actor and mother to a dancing machine. Read more of her stories at tinyurl.com/atldanielle.

ANDREW ECCLES



Kirven Boyd and Rachael McLaren

"You definitely have to be a strong dancer, a strong person, a strong artist to be an Ailey man."

The dancers always look forward to visiting Atlanta, calling it a home away from home, says Mack, who danced with Ailey from 2005 to 2008 and returned in 2011. Boyd says they know where all the restaurants are and always have a good time here.

At home in New York, Ailey dancers do their work and go their separate ways. On the road it's different, Mack says. They eat, travel and stay together.

Boyd and Mack want you to know two things about Ailey dancers: They are normal and they are amazing. Onstage the dancers are larger than life; offstage, says Mack, they are down to earth. They're amazing because they dance