



DANCING *Dreams*

Alvin Ailey's Renee Robinson
celebrates 27 years in the spotlight

By Ashley Brazzel

*T*here's a word used to describe the feeling you get when you love what you do. When your mind tells you to stop, but your heart says keep at it. Renee Robinson is the epitome of passion. As the senior-most member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT), she's been going strong with the company for 27 years and is showing no signs of slowing down. Since the age of 10, when she enrolled in her first after-school dance program at the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet in Washington, D.C., she's done what others have only imagined. She's lived out her dream in the spotlight — while vicariously fulfilling one of her mom's. From Broadway stages to White House dinners and more, she's shown audiences her interpretative side through such notable pieces as "Revelations," "Sweet Bitter Love" and "Cry." Now, at a time when many would call it a career, she keeps light on her feet and refuses to bow out just yet.

ANDREW ECCLES; DRESS BY BADGLEY MISCHKA

"I think I'd have to attribute it to the great experience I've had here in the Ailey organization for so many years," she says. "I started on scholarship in the Ailey School, and at the time they had a workshop company. I was a part of that company, which was headed by former dancer Kelvin Rotardier, and then I moved on to the junior company Ailey II, before joining the main company." Formerly the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, Ailey II (headed by renowned Julliard-trained dancer-choreographer Sylvia Waters) fuses the brightest young dance talent with emerging choreographers to form a professional, widely popular, touring company that often serves as the training base for future AAADT dancers.

Before being introduced to the Ailey organization in 1979, Robinson honed her craft at the School of American Ballet and the Dance Theatre of Harlem. But with a background in classical ballet, it didn't take long before the variety and



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Renee Robinson performs in Alvin Ailey's "Revelations"; Amos J. Machanic Jr., Renee Robinson, Clifton Brown and Rosalyn Deshauters in Hope Boykin's "Go In Grace."

modern teaching of the Ailey School had her hooked. "I really, really loved the challenge," she says. "I loved having to have to use my brain. Not to mention performing and learning new ballets and working with a lot of different, wonderful choreographers and all types of artists."

As she worked her way up the ranks, Robinson found herself learning from Alvin Ailey himself. She absorbed the pearls of wisdom that flowed from him and at the same time, took note of everything the senior members did, from "watching how they handled the load, the pressure, and the demands of being in such a high profile dance company, [to] watching them not only as dancers and artists, but watching them as people. It was a full experience."

Under the guidance of Judith Jamison, the famed choreographer and dancer who succeeded Ailey as artistic director, Robinson has continued to evolve, ultimately finding herself in the position of adviser, although she "never really thinks of it as taking on a role."

"I do have more of a responsibility because of where I am in that process,"

she adds. "But I think of it as the natural part of the journey and the continuation of the dance ... that kind of teaching and sharing and giving happens across the board."

If everything goes as planned, she hopes to rock until she can't roll anymore, possibly assuming a different title within the company she's seen through its highs (creative and fiscal reinvigoration, and a recent 50-year anniversary) and lows (loyalty to an organization on the brink of bankruptcy nearly two decades ago).

"Of course, no one can dance forever," she says. "I've had a great, great journey. Oh my goodness, a great journey, and there will come a time when it will be time for that next journey. I'm looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to using all of the wonderful things I have learned in this part of the organization as a dancer, and carrying it forward to that next journey."

Currently, on the fourth-leg of a 27-city North American Tour, Robinson's "most sparkly person" can be seen at the Fabulous Fox, Feb. 19 – 22. ■

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