

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

FROM BEFORE

Company Premiere

(1978)

Choreography by Garth Fagan

Music by Ralph MacDonald

Costumes by Garth Fagan

Lighting by C.T. Oakes

**“From Before...It was looking back at my origins in the West Indies and seeing how I could take away all the trimmings and the costumes of African and Caribbean dance and strip it right down to the bare bones.” –
Garth Fagan**

In the ensemble work *From Before*, Jamaican-born choreographer Garth Fagan – a Tony Award winner for *The Lion King* – expertly distills the dance traditions of his heritage to display movement in its purest form. The Ailey company premiere is the first time this revered, quintessential work, which distills movement to its purest form and features a jazzy percussive score by Trinidadian Grammy winner **Ralph MacDonald**, will be staged for a company other than Garth Fagan Dance. Mr. Fagan attributed its popularity with audiences all across the world to “the fluidity of Caribbean dance, the polyrhythms of African, the precision of ballet and the strength and weight of modern dance.”

Artistic Director Robert Battle comments, “I think Fagan is a true original, and he has a very unique and, in a way, abstract approach to movement. There is an element of purity in his work - he’s trying to show all of these different methods and how they mirror one another, but how they’re totally separate in some ways. *From Before* is a quintessential representation of Garth’s artistry.”

From Before, which originally debuted on Garth Fagan Dance in 1978, exhibits Fagan’s distinctive integration of many diverse dance styles, including the rich tradition of movement in the pre-Westernized world, to form a natural visual eclecticism. It is the second of Fagan’s works to enter the Ailey repertory; his first work for the company, entitled *Jukebox for Alvin*, premiered in 1993.



Photo from garthfagandance.org

“In the 1978 *From Before* Mr. Fagan seemed to be giving his dancers dessert ...extraordinary physical fluidity and acuity.”

- *The New York Times*, Jennifer Dunning - Nov. 8, 2007

“*From Before* serves as epiphany, an amalgamation, like Fagan himself, of Caribbean flavor and contemporary design.”

- *Chicago Tribune*, Sid Smith - Oct. 26, 1997

“The equally vigorous “From Before,” to music by Ralph MacDonald, resembles a ritual, its 13 dancers often bent low to the ground and then stretched upward with their arms raised. Earth and sky are surely being honored.”

- *The New York Times*, Jack Anderson, - Sept. 28, 1992

“From Before,” created in 1978, is a potent statement of Mr. Fagan’s belief in the value and validity of quite disparate kinds of movement as elements in modern dance choreography.

- *The New York Times*, Jennifer Dunning, - Nov. 19, 1989

About Garth Fagan

Garth Fagan is the founder and artistic director of the award-winning and internationally acclaimed Garth Fagan Dance, now celebrating its 40th Anniversary season. A Tony and Olivier award winner, Fagan continually renews his own distinctive dance vocabulary, which draws on many sources: sense of weight in modern dance, torso-centered movement and energy of Afro-Caribbean, speed and precision of ballet, and the rule breaking experimentation of the post-moderns.

For his path-breaking choreography for Walt Disney's *The Lion King*, Fagan was awarded the prestigious 1998 Tony Award for Best Choreography, as well as an Astaire Award, a Laurence Olivier Award, and a Helpmann Award. Recently, Garth Fagan has been listed as one of the many influential African Americans in *The Griot's 100 List of 2012*. In the world of concert dance Fagan choreographs primarily for Garth Fagan Dance. His recent work, *Mudan 175/39*, was named by *The New York Times* as the third of the top six dance watching moments of 2009. Fagan has also produced commissions for a number of leading companies, including a solo for Judith Jamison, *Scene Seen* for the debut of the Jamison Project; and *Jukebox for Alvin* for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, among others. Fagan began his career when he toured Latin America with Ivy Baxter and her national dance company from Jamaica. Baxter, and two other famed dance teachers from the Caribbean, Pearl Primus and Lavinia Williams, were major influences on Fagan. In New York City, Fagan studied with Martha Graham, Jose Limon, Mary Hinkson, and Alvin Ailey, who were all central to his development.

In September 2012, Fagan collaborated with Grammy-winning musician and composer Wynton Marsalis on the world premiere of his newest work, *Lighthouse/Lightning Rod* at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in celebration of BAM's 150th anniversary and Garth Fagan Dance's 40th anniversary.

About Ralph MacDonald

Grammy-award winning percussionist, songwriter and producer Ralph MacDonald was born in Harlem, NY in 1944. As the son of Trinidad-immigrant and Calypso performer "Macbeth The Great," Ralph grew up amidst the rise of Calypsonian revolution in New York City. He did a 10 year stint with Harry Belafonte that schooled him in the music business. At 27, MacDonald, Bill Salter and William Eaton started their own publishing company, Antisia Music. MacDonald began recording with legends like James Taylor, Billy Joel, Bette Midler, Diana Ross, Paul Simon, and most notably, Grover Washington Jr. He remained active composing, recording, and performing through the following decade and into the new millennium; MacDonald's albums during the '90s and 2000s have included *Reunion* (1995), *Just the Two of Us* (1996), *Port Pleasure* (1998), *Trippin'* (2000), *Home Grown* (2003), and *Mixty Motions* (2008). Mr. MacDonald passed away in December of 2011.

FROM BEFORE

Music credit information

Song: *The Path*

Written by: Ralph MacDonald

Performed by: Ralph MacDonald from the recording *The Path*