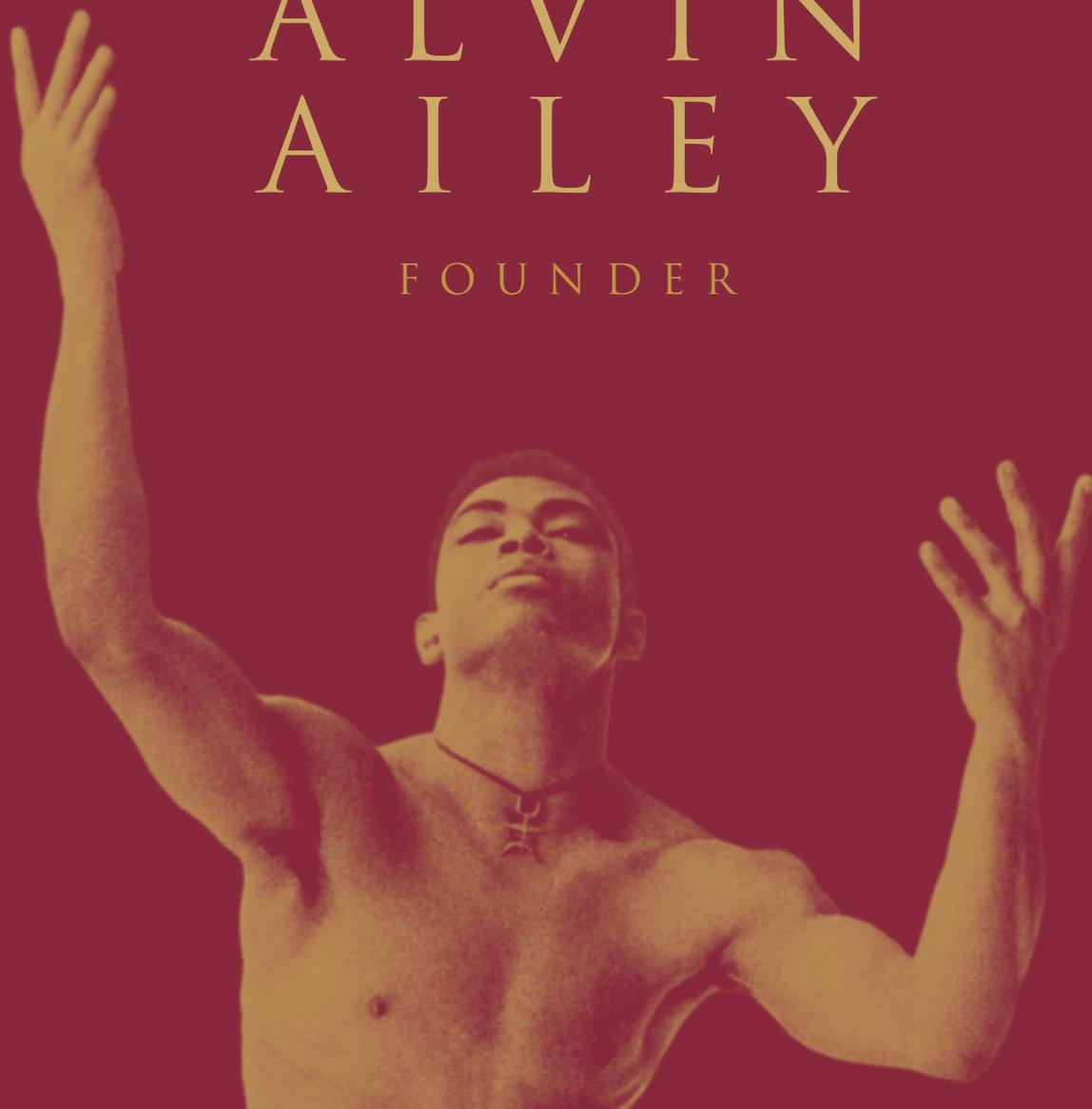
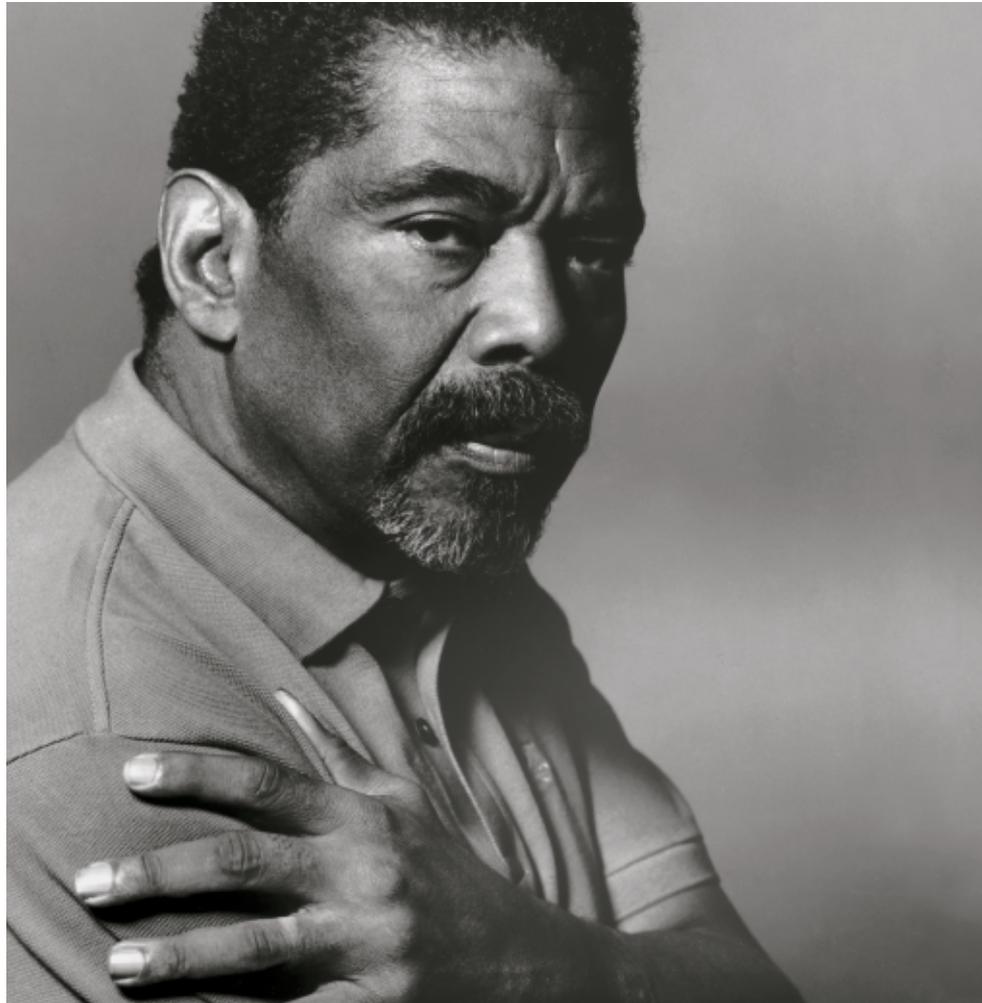


**A**lvin Ailey was born on January 5, 1931 in Rogers, Texas, where he spent his formative years attending Sunday School and participating in the Baptist Young People's Union. These pivotal experiences of life in the rural south would later inspire some of Ailey's most memorable works, including his first ballet, *Blues Suite*, and the acclaimed masterpiece *Revelations*. At age 12, Ailey moved with his mother to Los Angeles, California, where he fell in love with concert dance during a junior high school class trip to the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Further inspired by performances of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company and the classes with Lester Horton that his friend Carmen de Lavallade urged him to take, Ailey began his formal dance training. Horton, the founder of the first racially integrated dance company in the United States, became a mentor for Ailey as the young dancer embarked on his professional career.

# ALVIN AILEY

FOUNDER





OPPOSITE: ALVIN AILEY PHOTO BY NORMAND MAXON THIS PAGE: PHOTO BY ERIC N. HONG

After Horton's death in 1953, Ailey became director of the Lester Horton Dance Theater and began to choreograph his own works. In 1954, he and Carmen de Lavallade were invited to New York to dance in the Broadway show *House of Flowers* by Truman Capote. In New York, Ailey studied with such outstanding dance artists as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm and Karel Shook. He also took acting classes with Stella Adler and his versatility won Ailey a number of acting roles while he continued to choreograph and dance professionally.

In 1958, Ailey founded Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to carry out his vision of a company dedicated to enriching the American modern dance heritage and preserving the uniqueness of the African American cultural experience. Two years later he recalled the religious heritage of his youth to create *Revelations*, a masterpiece of American modern dance that would go on to become the Company's signature work, beloved around the world. The Company's early years were

shaped by the talents of dancers such as Minnie Marshall, Thelma Hill, Loretta Abbott, Joan Peters, Kelvin Rotardier, Liz Williamson, Nat Horne, Myrna White and James Truitte.

During the Company's first decade, the prolific Ailey created approximately 20 ballets, among them *Hermit Songs* (1961) and *Reflections in D* (1962). These were followed by *The River* (1970), *The Lark Ascending* (1972), *Love Songs* (1972), *Hidden Rites* (1973), *Night Creature* (1974), *The Mooche* (1975), *Memoria* (1979), *Landscape* (1981), *For 'Bird'-With Love* (1984), *Survivors* (1986), *Witness* (1986) and *Opus McShann* (1988). Although he created some 79 ballets, Ailey maintained that the Company was not a repository for his choreography alone but should include works by dance pioneers as well as young, emerging choreographers. Over 200 works by more than 70 choreographers have been performed by the Company in its 49 year history.

Since its inception, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has performed for more than 21



million people in 48 states and in 71 countries on six continents, earning the Company a reputation as one of the most popular international ambassadors of American culture. Ailey ballets have appeared in the repertoires of major dance companies around the world, including American Ballet Theatre, The Joffrey Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Paris Opera Ballet and La Scala Ballet.

In 1965, Ailey discovered an extraordinarily talented young dancer named Judith Jamison, whose brilliant dancing and creative style provided the inspiration for a number of Ailey works, including his best-known solo, *Cry*. Created as a tribute to Ailey's mother, Mrs. Lula Cooper, *Cry* was dedicated "to all Black women everywhere—especially our mothers."

Ailey founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center (now The Ailey School) in 1969, with an initial enrollment of 125 students. Today, under the direction of Denise Jefferson, a prestigious faculty trains students from around the world who contribute to a multicultural richness that is unique among dance schools. The Ailey School offers classes from beginning through professional levels and a comprehensive curriculum that includes Horton, Dunham, Taylor and Graham-based modern dance techniques, ballet, jazz, West African dance, Spanish dance,

classical Indian dance, tap and yoga classes.

To help talented students make the leap from studio to stage, Ailey formed the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble in 1974. In 1999, the Repertory Ensemble was officially re-named Ailey II. Under the guidance of former

Ailey dancer Sylvia Waters, who has served as artistic director since the Company's inception, Ailey II has emerged as an acclaimed professional company in its own right. It has won critical praise for its national tours and residencies at major colleges and universities, as well as its visits to public schools across the country.



LEFT: PHOTO BY EVA F. MAZE RIGHT: PHOTO BY PAUL HINNEL

Ailey's commitment to education is also evident in the Company's long-standing involvement in arts in education programs, particularly those benefiting underserved communities. Free performances, mini-performances, lecture/demonstrations, workshops and master classes have been offered throughout the United States and around the world. AileyCamp, a unique national program, brings young people ages 11-14 to a full-scholarship summer day camp that combines dance classes with personal development workshops, creative writing classes and field trips. Currently, there are AileyCamps in Kansas City, MO; Kansas City, KS; Bridgeport, CT; Chicago, IL; Boston, MA; Berkeley/Oakland, CA; Atlanta, GA; and in Washington Heights and Staten Island, NY (in collaboration with the Children's Aid Society).

Throughout his lifetime, Alvin Ailey received recognition for his achievements. He was awarded numerous honorary doctoral degrees, including one from Princeton University. In 1976, the NAACP awarded Ailey the Spingarn Award and in 1982 he received the United Nations Peace Medal. From the world of dance he received the 1975 *Dance Magazine* Award, the 1979 Capezio Award and modern dance's most prestigious prize—the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award—in 1987. In 1988, he received the Kennedy Center Honor in recognition of his extraordinary contribution to American culture and achievement in the performing arts.

American dance lost one of its most luminous stars when Ailey died on December 1, 1989. Writing in *The New York Times*, Anna Kisselgoff said of Ailey, "you didn't need to have known [him] personally to have been touched by his humanity, enthusiasm and exuberance and his courageous stand for multi-racial brotherhood." Upon being named artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater on December 20, 1989, Judith Jamison remarked, "Mr. Ailey's spiritual and moral support served as a constant inspiration to me as an artist. He was my spiritual walker, my mentor and support. He gave me legs until I could stand on my own, as a dancer and choreographer. I view this appointment as the course to take to continue my vision and to keep Mr. Ailey's legacy alive."