

Walter's World: Ailey II A Choreographic Laboratory

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By Walter Rutledge



Ailey II has evolved into a formidable force in the modern dance community. The company is presently experiencing unparalleled success having recently completed a 49-city tour spanning both North America and Europe. The professional work ethic is a combination of a nurturing dance symposium, and boot camp.

Many of the performers have advanced to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, while others have distinguished themselves in all aspects of the dance and theater. We all acknowledge the contributions and impact the company has made with respect to cultivating dancers, but the company has also played a vital in the development of choreographers. For over 37 years Ailey II has presented a diverse repertoire,

consisting of new and established choreographers.

Renowned choreographers Talley Beatty, Ulysses Dove, George Faison and Alvin Ailey have worked with the company providing a professional edge and panache. Ailey II has also been a dance laboratory offering new and emerging dance makers an opportunity to hone their craft. Christopher Huggins, Ailey II Associate Artistic Director Troy Powell, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre Artistic Director Judith Jamison, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Artistic Director Designate Robert Battle, and Francesca Harper, are a few of the talented choreographers whose careers have been enriched by their experiences with the company.

The upcoming Ailey II season (April 6- 17) continues in this tradition presenting works by six choreographers including Kyle Abraham, Donald Byrd, Robert Moses and Thang Dao. Recently we had a chance to talk to two artists whose work will be presented this season Sidra Bell and Carlos dos Santos. Each choreographer discussed their work, the art form of dance and their unique vision.

Sidra Bell received her training at Dance Theater of Harlem and The Ailey School, but took a different path when she decided to attend Yale University and pursue a B.A. in History. She returned to dance, but continued her academic pursuits at Purchase College Conservatory of Dance where she received an M.F.A. in Choreography. Presently Bell is the Artistic Director of Sidra Bell Dance New York. Her company has performed at Tribeca PAC, Dance Theater Workshop, Montreal's Tangente, Riverside Church, CityParks Dance Festival, Stella Adler Studio of Acting, the Margie Gillis Foundation, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Joyce SoHo and the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Inside/Out Series.

Bell is always exploring and testing her boundaries. *La Valse*, the work that will be presented by Ailey II, will feature music composed by her father Dennis Bell. The daughter and father team recently received a grant and will present the new work later this month at Baruch College. She has also received commissions from Ailey/Fordham B.F.A. Program, Ballet Divertimento, Arts Umbrella, Canadian Children's Dance Theatre in Toronto, Purchase College, Perry Mansfield, LaGuardia High School, Ballet Austin, Sacramento Ballet, Ailey II and The Juilliard School. Bell is also the





recipient of the Patricia Kerr Ross Award from New York Foundation for the Arts and was awarded a Bessie Schönberg Choreographers Residency at The Yard.

Carlos dos Santos, Jr. began dancing at age 16 in Brazil and after a year of study began his performing career. Within a short period of time Dos Santos was performing as a principal dancer with major Brazilian dance companies such as Grupo Salto, Bale Folclorico da Bahia, Bale Teatro Castro Alves and DanceBrazil. A performance by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater inspired him to leave Brazil and pursue a career in the United States. He received a scholarship to the

Ailey school and eventually became a member of Ailey II.

Dos Santos has also performed with Complexions Contemporary Ballet, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble; but he was drawn to choreography as a way to express himself. His choreographic credits include works for Colorado Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Dance Festival, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, and DanceBrazil, for which he has created many projects including his latest collaboration with award-winning composer, Tania Leon. Dos Santos and Leon continue the collaborative process with Proximity, his work for the Ailey II season.

When talking about Ailey II both artists conveyed a feeling of returning home. They were honored to have the opportunity to present their works on such talented and proficient dancers. Each expressed the caring and nurturing environment afforded them to create, and develop their craft. Ailey II will offer 14 performances beginning Wednesday April 6 for tickets and more information visit www.alvinailey.org or www.ovationtix.com or call [866-811-4111](tel:866-811-4111).



Photos: 1) Proximity by Carlos dos Santos 2) Blues Suite by Alvin Ailey 3) Divining by Judith Jamison 4) La Valse by Sidra Bell Photos by Eduardo Patino