

## Marcus Willis Comes Home With Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Submitted by [Jo-Carolyn Goode](#) on Friday, 20 March 2009 [No Comment](#)



Home is a safe place for most of us. It is a place where we are most comfortable and where we can be our true self. It reminds me of the song by Stephanie Mills, “When I think of home, I think of a place where there’s love overflowing....” For Marcus Jarrell Willis joining the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) company was like going home. “Once I was in the company and in the flow of things, rehearsing and performing, it just felt like I was at home, and all nervousness kind of disappeared,” said Willis, who went through a range of emotions when he was invited to join the famed dance company last year. “I think we have our own things that make us nervous, and I still get nervous everyday when I perform with the company even though it’s been a year, but I honestly hope that feeling never dies in me because I feel as though that is what keeps the love alive that everyone in this company has for Mr. Ailey’s work.” What’s so special about Marcus feeling at home in the big city of New York? Well, it is because he is from the bayou city. He is a Houstonian, born and raised. Coming from a theatrical family young Marcus knew he was called to the stage but he thought his calling was in the form of an actor or singer. Being a dancer was the last thing on his

mind, that is until he attended Johnston Performing Arts Middle School and his eyes were literally opened to the art form. “I was reluctant to start dancing when I was only 11 at Johnston,” said Willis, who credits the dance teacher at the time with sparking his interest. “She was the one who opened my eyes to dance because initially I wasn’t even interested.” From that early start Willis went on to the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. “Just being in an atmosphere of not only dancers who love what they do but also artists, musicians, and vocalists, kind of put me in the realm of the arts,” added Willis.

From being in the realm of the dance field to moving straight into the global world of it, Marcus jumped in feet first when he was bit by the dancing bug. After attending a summer program in New York City sponsored by the AAADT, the young Marcus came home and told his mother that he was leaving Houston to go study dance in the Big Apple. He was only 16. “It kind of just fit. Growing up with so many people around me saying ‘you should go to Ailey;’ ‘you should dance for Ailey;’ ‘you should go to school and train there;’ ‘you just seem like you would fit in there so well.’ And I think that every dancer just looks for a perfect fit,” said Willis. After seeing them (AAADT) dance for the first time, Willis’ reaction was “Immediately I was like ‘omigosh’ everyone was right.” Now he is on top of the world living out his dream because he became a member of AAADT last year and he is ready to perform live for his hometown.



On March 27 – 29, 2009, Jones Hall will never be the same as the culmination of 50 years of dance explodes on the stage in the form of the AAADT. Houston is one of the stops on the company’s 50 city global tour in celebration of the 50th anniversary. Led by the artistry of Judith Jamison, AAADT will bring beauty, power and passion to the stage in three performances featuring Grammy-Award winning musical group Sweet Honey in the Rock as they introduce new pieces and perform timeless classics. In the heart of all the action will be hometown boy Marcus Willis. “Just to know that you are a part of something that began even before your birth and to see that it is still so powerful,” said Willis as he struggled to put his feelings into words. “It is amazing to be a part of that and to know that a man from Texas, where I am from, started choreographing with a small group of dancers and created all these wonderful works. Just to be able to say that I am actually a part of that really means something.”

Get a feel of what the something Willis trying to convey is by viewing AAADT live. Tickets range from \$20-\$60 and can be purchased online at [www.spahouston.org](http://www.spahouston.org), by phone at 713-227-4SPA or at the courtyard level ticket office at Jones Hall located at 615 Louisiana St. Hours of operation: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. Monday – Friday, and 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Saturday. For groups of 15 or more, call 713-632-8113.