

RENOWNED CHOREOGRAPHER TO TAKE HELM AT AILEY DANCE COMPANY

BY//CLARENCE WALDRON

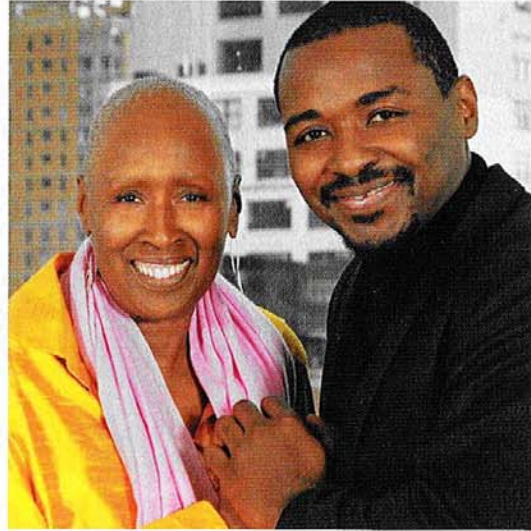
Robert Battle was about 13 when he first saw the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater company. Sitting in the audience and watching the troupe changed his life forever, he recalls. He knew right then that dance would become his life.

"That was the moment I knew I would take dance as far as I could," he says. "It left an indelible impression on me, this awesome thing taking place, live and in person right in front of me, onstage."

His life has come full circle. He is now poised to lead the acclaimed company. Judith Jamison announced that she is passing the mantle as artistic director to Battle. He will work side by side with her from now until July 1, 2011, when she retires and he assumes full responsibilities.

Battle, 37, says it was "Earth-shatteringly exciting" when Jamison told him he had the job. "I don't know whether to call this the proudest moment of my life or the most humbling. With the help of Judith Jamison and the great, great dancers in this company, I hope to be worthy of this tremendous responsibility. I am looking forward to adding my voice in the mix and moving into the future."

No newcomer to the Ailey company, Battle is a well-known choreographer and has created ballets for the dance company and the young Ailey II dance troupe since 1999 and has served as Artist-in-Residence with The Ailey School. He is a graduate of The Juilliard



PAUL KOLNIK ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE//AP

School and founded his own group, Battleworks Dance Company.

Judith Jamison and Robert Battle at the Alvin Ailey studios in N.Y.

One of his acclaimed choreographed pieces, *In/Side*, has become a must-see number on the current Ailey tour. *In/Side* features a male dancer interpreting the music of Nina Simone's *Wild Is The Wind*.

"It's really a very naked expression of pain and struggle. The boy is caught in a hurricane of emotions, wild is the wind. He dances with abandonment," he says.

Battle will continue the company's tradition of exposing dance to inner-city youth, started by company founder Alvin Ailey. "Mr. Ailey always said, 'Dance comes from the people and it should always be delivered back to them.'"

For photos of this season's Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater tour, visit myjet247.com. //