

# MANHATTAN

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LEADER OF THE PACK Robert Battle, the new artistic director at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

## Preparing for Battle

On July 1, modern-dance choreographer Robert Battle, 37, takes over as the artistic director at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, succeeding the founder's beloved protégée, Judith Jamison. He spoke to *Manhattan* about scoring the job of a lifetime.

**When were you first introduced to the works of Alvin Ailey?** I was a young 12-year-old sitting in a dark theater in Miami watching *Revelations*. That theater illuminated possibility for me—that anything and everything was possible. **What makes this company so special?** Our dancers very much want to express something to you that reminds you of your own humanity. I think that was the persona of Mr. Ailey and Ms. Jamison. **What's next?** We're in a position to really affect the entire field, which is why I've started a new choreography lab, or incubator—it gives mid-level or emerging choreographers a platform for process, not just product. **Have you been working your entire career for this?** I never felt I understood something unless I could teach it to someone else.

**What inspires you?** Music. Usually when I create a dance, I feel like a musician rather than a dance maker. Like a jazz musician, you listen to see where you can add to what is already there, rather than bombard it. **It's about nuance...** Absolutely. Oftentimes a composer will say, "I didn't expect anyone to hear that little part there!" It's about deconstructing things in a different way. **Where might we find you in your downtime?** I love Jazz at Lincoln Center, Cleopatra's Needle and St. Nick's Pub. **In your heart, are you a dancer or a choreographer?** A choreographer. I like to create "happy accidents" that go beyond my own sense of movement and to see the potential of the person in front of me. In that way, I think that's what my whole job is about—choreographing the future.