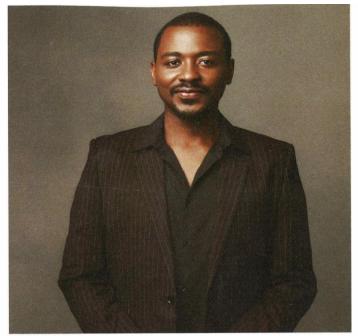
MANHATTAN

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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 aboutchoreographing the future.