

## Middle-school student a part Alvin Ailey's legacy

By Marcus E. Howard  
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EAST COBB — Simpson Middle School seventh-grader Aniya Cardell has followed in her older sister's footsteps as an AileyCamp dance student, but is now moving to her own beat as an aspiring entertainer.

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is currently visiting Atlanta on its 27 cities U.S. and Canadian tour through Sunday at the Fox Theatre, led by new artistic director Robert Battle. A performance is scheduled at tonight at 8.

Each summer, the dance company sponsors a nationwide camp for students ages 11 to 14, founded in 1989 by the late legendary dance choreographer Alvin Ailey, to develop positive character, creativity and critical thinking skills in underserved metro Atlanta students.

Aniya, 12, has been attending the AileyCamp Atlanta for the past two summers and hopes to return this year.

"I learn how to be a leader," Aniya said. "And not just by dancing, but during different life situations I can possibly get into. So they taught me how to be stronger along the way in life."

AileyCamp is a six-week intensive program for boys and girls that trains students in ballet, jazz, tap, West African and modern dance. It also includes personal development classes that focus on such topics as goal setting, self-image, conflict resolution, career development and nutrition.

About 100 students attend the camp each year. All campers receive full tuition scholarships, breakfast and lunch, camp uniforms and dance clothing. Dance experience isn't required, but camp candidates must submit an application and are interviewed. Selections are based on who would most benefit from the camp, according to the program.

AileyCamp Atlanta director Diane Sales said Aniya — who followed her now 17-year-old sister Sierra Abdul'Ahad into the program — has thrived as an AileyCamp participant.

"Aniya came to us really shy; she's really a tiny girl," said Sales, a former Ailey II Company dancer. "To see her grow from one year to the next is amazing. I think Aniya has so much confidence now. She's just become a mature young lady."

Aniya, who has danced since age 4, said her favorite form of dance is jazz because it's similar to hip-hop. Besides dance, she also plays the violin in a youth orchestra and is in a singing group with her sister. She said she wants to be an entertainer when she grows up.

"It has helped me grow as a dancer and a leader," Aniya said of the camp.

Bakeerah Abdul'Ahad said she loves how the camp has helped her daughters grow. Aniya's 11-year-old younger sister, Jaida Cardell, is hoping to join the camp this summer.

"It's been a part of our lives for the past five years now," said Bakeerah. "Not only is it helping them with a lot of life choices, but they're building friendships and they're somewhat of a family she still keeps in contact with."

AileyCamp Atlanta will run this year from June 4 to July 13. The application deadline is March 8. While the Fox Theatre provides financial assistance, donations are sought.

For more information, visit [www.foxtheatre.org/campailey.aspx](http://www.foxtheatre.org/campailey.aspx).



For the past two years, Simpson Middle School seventh-grader Aniya Cardell has participated in a summer camp sponsored by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The company is on a 27-city tour and is visiting Atlanta this weekend. Photo: Meghan Stauts