

LENS

CHESTER HIGGINS JR.



Vision

Judith Jamison is artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and adviser to the Ailey II company and the Ailey School — “the overseer of all that is Ailey,” as she describes herself.

Ms. Jamison joined the Ailey company in 1965: “I learned eight dances in two weeks, and then we were on the road.”

She says Ailey dancers “are all sizes and shape — all muscle, but tall, short, a little wider, a little narrower, from everywhere in the world, and every dancer knows when you start in my company, you come out on stage a 10; then you can work your way up to wherever you’re going.”

“I tell my dancers you achieve that by understanding that the body God gave you is a 10,” she says. “He gave you something perfect to work with.”

Ms. Jamison looks for dancers with “a person inside of them, who can translate their life.”

She is originally from Philadelphia, but has spent most of her life in New York City. “This was my path. I feel like an ordained minister; I was supposed to preach here. Through dance, we’re as close to God as we’re going to get — until he calls us home.”