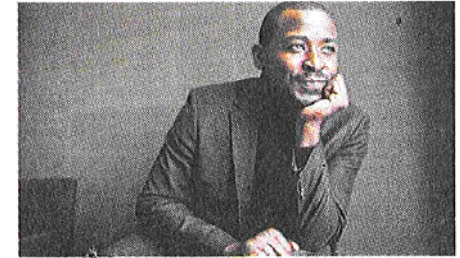


The New York Times

Alvin Ailey Leader Named
Robert Battle will become that dance company's artistic director. PAGE C1



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THE Arts

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Alvin Ailey Company Names a New Leader

By DANIEL J. WAKIN

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, one of the nation's most successful dance troupes, said on Wednesday that it would entrust its future to Robert Battle, a 37-year-old outside choreographer who has had a long association with the company.

Ailey announced Mr. Battle's appointment as artistic director, to succeed Judith Jamison when she retires in June 2011. He will begin working at Ailey this July in tandem with Ms. Jamison, who will become artistic director emerita when the transition is complete.

While a search committee of Ailey's board labored for more than two years Mr. Battle had long been anointed by Ms. Jamison as her successor.

Hours after being offered the job, Mr. Battle sounded stunned, using adjectives

like "shocked," "thrilled" and "speechless." Then he gathered his words and said the company represented not just dancers and choreographers but African-Americans as well.

The company "stands as a beacon and testament to our survival," he said. "Also, it's an American story. When we think of the American dream, Alvin Ailey lived that." (Alvin Ailey, who founded the troupe in 1958, died in 1989.) Mr. Battle described the position as a calling, not just a job. "The implications are huge," he said. Mr. Battle said that he would program at least one of his works each season and bring in outside choreographers. He said that it was too early to mention names, but that some might be Europeans little known to the Ailey troupe, and he suggested he would

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ANDREA MÖHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Robert Battle will become the new artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Alvin Ailey Names a New Leader Who Has a Strong Link to Troupe

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bring in works by other major choreographers with companies of their own.

"I like things that sometimes challenge an audience," Mr. Battle said. "Sometimes they can be slightly confusing, but they inspire dialogue. They move the crowd."

He will be required to dissolve his own company, BattleWorks, based in New York. "There's a certain sense of sadness," he said.

Several prominent figures in the dance world welcomed the choice, but noted the big shoes Mr. Battle must fill.

Charles L. Reinhart, director of the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C., said Mr. Battle had a broad perspective on the dance field. "I see him at all the performances," said Mr. Reinhart, whose festival has presented BattleWorks. "It's a challenge to step into Alvin's shoes. It's a challenge to step into her shoes," he said of Ms. Jamison. "There's a shadow over your head, but I think this is a guy who can handle all that."

Linda Shelton, executive director of the Joyce Theater, the New York dance presenter, said: "This is going to be a tough position for anyone to fill. Judith was so successful and really an advocate and great personality for that company." But Ailey is known for having a strong administrative team and solid board, she added, saying, "They must all feel that he can do it or they wouldn't have picked him."

Since 1999 Mr. Battle has created a total of nine works for Ailey's main company; its junior troupe, Ailey II; and the Ailey school. They include "Juba" (2003), "Love Stories" (2004, as one of three choreographers), "Unfold" (2005) and "In/Side" (2008).

His work has been described as high-energy, with plentiful leaps and spins, physically demanding and emotive. Alastair Macaulay, chief dance critic for The New York Times, took note of his deep knowledge of craft and cited his virtues in a 2008 review, writing that Mr. Battle's work conveys "the exciting effects, the contrasts, the skill in

Alastair Macaulay contributed reporting.



Samuel Lee Roberts of the Alvin Ailey troupe in Robert Battle's "In/Side."



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

showing several things happening at the same time." But he said that Mr. Battle's dancers could "seem driven, hectic, tense, involuntary."

Ailey's challenge was to find an artistic director who could tend to its tradition and image, which have kept audiences members coming, yet also provide an invigorating voice.

"He was chosen because he knows Ailey," said Sharon Gersten Luckman, the executive director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, the umbrella organization for the company. "He gets the tradition, he respects what's gone on before, and he's going to bring something that's fresh."

Mr. Battle will inherit a conglomerate — two companies, a main training school, an extension school and a community outreach arm — that runs like a Lexus of the dance world. It has recorded surpluses — an expected \$1.4 million this season and \$1.9 million last season, during which it celebrated its 50th anniversary — while many other arts institutions are in the red.

The company operates out of its own five-year-old gleaming headquarters on Ninth Avenue and 55th Street in Clinton, which it calls the largest building dedicated to dance in the country. Its school holds 300 classes a week; 13,000 people participate in its extension program each year.

Every year the main company, which has 30 dancers, goes on extended tours, visiting 20 to 25 American cities and spending five to eight weeks abroad. It has a five-week Manhattan stint at City Center. Ailey II employs 12



JACK MITCHELL

Top, Judith Jamison, who is retiring in 2011 as artistic director of Alvin Ailey, and Robert Battle, who will assume that role. Above, the company's founder, Alvin Ailey, and Ms. Jamison in 1975.

dancers and also tours extensively.

The overall budget is \$26 million. Ticket sales have been consistently strong, and the company raises only about 30 percent of its revenue from donors, lower than most performing arts groups. Fund-raising will be an important part of Mr. Battle's new job, along with managing a large staff.

Mr. Battle's current company is tiny in comparison, with seven

or eight dancers and a budget of several hundred thousand dollars. But he sounded undaunted, or tried to.

"The artistic bones are the same," he said.

Despite Ailey's financial and popular success, the company has labored under the perception from critics that its repertoire is thin and artistically shallow, with a reliance on the great war horse, "Revelations," the major work of Alvin Ailey.

Joan Weill, Ailey's board chairwoman and a major contributor to the company, acknowledged the criticism.

"We can't run ourselves by reviews, but we need to respect them," she said. "What we need to do is make it a little bit more edgy, perhaps."

She said that Mr. Battle was equipped for that: "He knows a lot of choreographers he can try out. I think he can really lead us and expand us in the future."

One source of tension will be the overlap with Ms. Jamison, a former Ailey dancer who took the company reins in December 1989, just weeks after Alvin Ailey died. On her watch the budget quadrupled, the company moved into its new building and the troupe became closely identified with her.

"We're going to have to see how that works out," Ms. Weill said of Ms. Jamison's continuing presence. "She's so much the heart of this company. I don't think she would do anything to make it difficult for Robert in any way, shape or form. I think she wants this to succeed as much as anybody does."

Mr. Battle said that he and Ms. Jamison had mutual respect. "I look forward to working with her and learning the ropes," he said. "She's been doing it for a while, and she does it pretty well."

Officials declined to discuss Mr. Battle's salary. Ms. Jamison earned \$663,000, according to the latest tax return, which also showed that a \$2.6 million annuity was purchased to provide retirement income for her.

In an interview Ms. Jamison praised the diversity of Mr. Bat-

ONLINE: TIMELINE

An interactive look at the history of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: nytimes.com/dance

tle's choreography, his ability to draw audiences into his works and his rapport with the dancers. Then she offered the highest praise around the company: "He also reminds me very much of Alvin."

Mr. Battle grew up in Miami, reared by his mother, a schoolteacher and part-time actress, and his great-uncle, a laborer. He started dancing in high school there, studying at the New World School of the Arts in 11th and 12th grades, then attended the Juilliard School and immediately joined Parsons Dance, where he was a member from 1994 to 2001.

Sylvia Waters, the artistic director of Ailey II, saw one of the works he choreographed for the Parsons troupe and invited him to set a dance for her performers. That produced "Mood Indigo" and led to a longstanding relationship.

"I've had some wonderful angels along the way," Mr. Battle said.

After studying videotapes of Alvin Ailey performances, he saw the company live for the first time in ninth grade on a school trip. "It was just jaw-dropping," he said. "In some ways I still feel like that little boy sitting in an audience with all those other students, looking in awe at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater."