

# All the right moves

*Alvin Ailey's American Dance Theater soars with Judith Jamison at the helm*

By JASMIN K. WILLIAMS

It was almost three decades ago that the late, great choreographer Alvin Ailey asked his good friend and former dancer Judith Jamison to take over his young and esteemed company.

"You don't say no to someone you love," remembers the Philadelphia native. "Here we are 50 years later, with more than 250 ballets in the repertoire," she says proudly.

It all started in March 1958 when a then young and unknown Texas-born choreographer Ailey choreographed a show with a group of young African-American dancers at New York's 92nd Street Young Men's Hebrew Association. That storied performance changed American dance forever.

Jamison warmly recalls meeting Ai-

ley several years later: "He saw me at an audition in 1965, the only audition I ever had. It was for a Harry Belafonte TV special. I showed up with tights and ballet shoes. Everyone else had wigs, stilettos and fishnets. I couldn't learn the steps because I was so nervous. At the last elimination of dancers, I was still

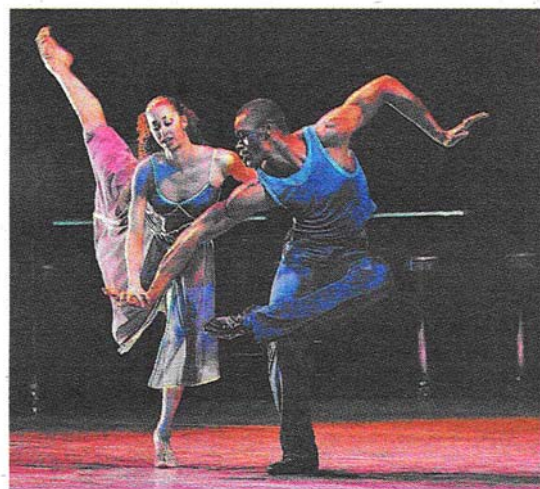
there. As I was leaving I passed a man on the steps. It was Ailey. He asked me to join the company."

She pauses then declares, "It was predestined."

Jamison's performance of "Cry" one of the most popular ballets in the repertoire is also one of the most celebrated in the history of modern dance.

"'Cry' was a birthday present for Alvin's mom in 1971," she explains. "He choreographed it especially for her. 'Cry' was a wonderful moment of spirit and flesh coming together, communicating all it was to be human."

While Jamison may not be on the floor officially dancing now, the 64-year-old's spirit is there with the hundreds of students who have learned the Alvin Ailey way and continue to



Paul Kohnik

Dancers groove in 'Reminiscent' (above and below).

dance at the company and in other places. Today, not only does the company perform throughout the nation and the world, but it also has a state-of-the-art school that is ushering in the next generation of artists.

"Ailey wanted to have a school that everyone could come to and understand the beauty and connection of dance and how dance brings us together as human beings," ex-

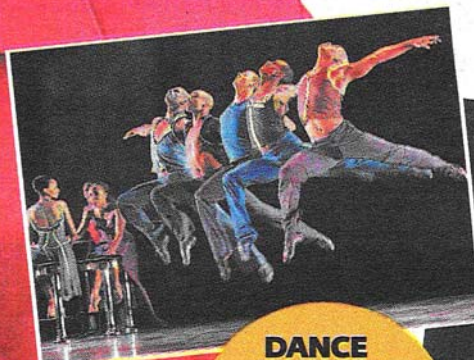
plains Jamison.

"It's truly important that people understand that they must come to the theater. Getting yourself to a theater to see modern dance with its many pieces of repertoire, and dancers that don't look like cookie-cutter dancers, who are all different and who are all celebrating the world of possibility with courage and faith in what they are doing is a spiritual experience."

Perhaps unlike with other companies, at the Alvin Ailey shows, the audience is part of that equation.

Visit [alvinailey.org](http://alvinailey.org) for class and performance schedule.

R. Falligant



### DANCE LEGEND

Judith Jamison's performance of "Cry" made her immortal on stage (right).