



## Judith Jamison, celebrates her 20th anniversary as artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

By Karyn D. Collins  
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In the arts world, especially in the dance community, long term survival is never a certainty. Surviving a founder's death is a noteworthy accomplishment. Thriving is a rarity.

But 20 years after the death of its founder and namesake, Alvin Ailey, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has done all of that. The company's upcoming New York season, which begins Dec. 2 and runs through Jan. 3 at New York's City Center ([www.nycitycenter.org](http://www.nycitycenter.org)), marks the 20th anniversary since current director Judith Jamison assumed the helm.

Jamison, at the time, had already forged her own noteworthy career as a choreographer and director of her own company after years as one of the Ailey company's most recognized and charismatic stars.

"It's gone by very fast," Jamison said of the past 20 years. "I'm so blessed and so happy to lead this organization to where it is at this moment. And this moment is magical. It's absolutely where we should be."

And that place where the company resides is at the top of the dance world where it enjoys a financial and creative stability that many arts organizations can only dream of.

Jamison credited the staff at Ailey, particularly associate director Masazumi Chaya, for helping her to steer the Ailey organization to success.

"And it all starts with a strong vision and we had that coming from Alvin Ailey," she said.

Jamison's 20 years at the helm will be celebrated during the company's upcoming New York season in several ways:

- A new ballet by Jamison, "Among Us (Private Spaces: Public Places)" with an original score by Eric Lewis
- A new work, "Uptown" by company member Matthew Rushing's that is to pay homage to the Harlem Renaissance
- A world premiere, "Dancing Spirit," by Ronald K. Brown's that is a tribute to Jamison
- A special Best of 20 Years program featuring excerpts of works by over 12 choreographers commissioned or revived during Jamison's tenure
- Live onstage appearances by actress Anna Deavere Smith in Judith Jamison's Emmy Award-winning "Hymn"
- The company premiere of Robert Battle's gripping solo In/Side

And of course the company will present plenty of performances of Ailey's masterpiece, "Revelations."

Jamison also holds a unique place in African American culture as a symbol of artistry, particularly that of black women. Even those who aren't familiar with dance recognize the famous images of her from the Ailey classic work "Cry" – her hair in its trademark short Afro, her long limbs swathed



The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performs Dec. 2-Jan. 3 at New York's City Center before embarking on a national tour.

in a white leotard and long, ruffled skirt.

Being recognized as such an iconic figure took some getting used to, Jamison admitted.

“At this age I can say this: it took me a long time to get there but I do understand it and I appreciate it because I do the same thing with those that I admire and recognize,” Jamison said. “But I always tell people ‘Hey, I have to do my laundry, too.’ I have to do the same things everyone else does.”

And one of those things is to move on to that next phase in a career. Last year, the 66-year-old Jamison announced that as of June 2011 she will become artistic director emerita as a new director takes over the helm.

“I’m looking at the future. I want this company to continue to soar and that means having the sense enough to move over,” Jamison said. “I’m not calling it a day. Once you’re with Ailey you’re always with Ailey. This gift that Alvin gave me, I’m just giving it, as he would give it, to someone.

“The future is going to be put in capable hands.”

Of course, the Ailey company’s magic isn’t limited to New York City. Part of what has made the company so beloved around the world is its intense touring schedule each season.

And of course Ailey II, the second company, has its own full schedule.

Here are some of the places where you can catch the main company after the New York season:

February 2 – 7, 2010

The Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, Washington, DC  
(202) 467-4600

February 9 – 14, 2010

Knight Theater, Charlotte, NC  
(704) 372-1000

February 18 – 21, 2010

The Fox Theatre, Atlanta, GA  
(404) 817-8700

February 23, 2010

Montgomery Performing Arts Centre, Montgomery, AL  
(800) 745-3000

February 25, 2010

Heymann Performing Arts Center, Lafayette, LA  
(800) 745-3000

February 26 – 27, 2010

Mahalia Jackson Theater, New Orleans, LA  
(504) 525-1052

March 2 – 7, 2010

Orange County Performing Arts Center, Orange County, CA  
(714) 556-2787

March 9 – 14, 2010

Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley, CA  
(510) 642-9988

March 16 – 17, 2010

Vilar Center, Beaver Creek, CO  
(888) 920-2787

March 19 – 21, 2010

Orpheum, Memphis, TN  
(901) 525-3000

March 24 – 28, 2010

Auditorium Theatre, Chicago, IL  
(312) 902-1500

April 6, 2010

Peace Center, Greenville, SC  
(864) 467-3000

April 8, 2010

Modlin Center for the Arts, Richmond, VA  
(804) 289-8980

April 10 – 11, 2010

Memorial Hall at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC  
(919) 843-3333

April 13, 2010

Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, Burlington, VT  
(802) 863-5966

April 15 – 18, 2010

Wang Center for the Performing Arts, Boston, MA  
(866) 348-9738  
May 7 – 9, 2010

New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC), Newark, NJ  
(888) 466-5722

May 18, 2010

Times Union Center, Jacksonville, FL  
(904) 633-6110

May 20 – 23, 2010

Adrienne Arsht Center, Miami, FL  
(305) 949-6722

June 10 – 20, 2010

Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) Brooklyn, New York  
(718) 636-4100