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## Ailey II looks to the future while preserving the past Friday's concert at the Eccles Center will open PCFAF's new season

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By Scott Iwasaki

The audience will see a diverse production when Ailey II, the renowned touring company of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre family, kicks off the Park City Performing Arts Foundation's 2012-13 season on Friday, Nov. 2.

The company will present a three-work repertory program that will feature something new, something old and something in between, said Artistic Director Troy Powell.

"We like to program evenings so the audience is able to take different journeys, if you will, throughout the night," Powell said during a phone interview from New York with *The Park Record*. "I also wanted to show the different range and ability of our dancers."



The first work, "Echoes," choreographed by Thang Dao, was acquired by Ailey II three years ago.

"'Echoes' was choreographed first for the Boston Conservatory," Powell said. "We watched a DVD and thought it would be a great fit for Ailey II." The piece is about Dao's journey from Vietnam to the United States.

"It addressed the different incidents and issues he experienced, but also celebrates his coming to America as a young boy with his family," Powell said. "It's more of a contemporary ballet and is a full-company work. It's one of those pieces that touch people and where you just exhale at the end because it's such a soothing production. "Every time the dancers hit the final pose, I listen for the audience's reaction, which is usually like a big deep breath," Powell said.

The second work on the program is a brand-new work called "Rusty," created by Paris-born choreographer Benoit Swan Pouffer.

"Benoit is a former member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and is the current artistic director of Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet," Powell explained. "We've performed the work maybe only three times." Powell said he can't wait for the Park City audience to see "Rusty."

"It has an interesting European flavor, which is a different style and aspect for our dancers," he said. "The way the piece is set up gives people in the audience a feeling that they are watching a dress rehearsal, and seeing a work in progress. "It's performed by nine dancers and has some comedy within the story," Powell said.

The final work will be the company's signature piece, Alvin Ailey's "Revelations."

"I chose this rep to challenge the dancers in different ways," Powell said. "They will have to wear three different hats each night, and that's the only way they will be able to grow as artists.

"I also wanted to feature a new piece like 'Rusty' and also bring a work that the dancers had already done like 'Echoes,'" he said. "I think it's important to bring 'Revelations' into each city we visit, because that is such an important piece for us." Putting together programs similar to this is always a challenge, he said.

"First, you have to choose works that are different, but also complement each other, and you're going to have pieces that will be a little more difficult artistically as programming, because you may have works by choreographers that have the

same sensibility as far as movement-quality, style and intent," Powell said. "We also have to think not only of the movement, but the music and the costumes of a piece as well."

Powell became Ailey II's artistic director this year, but started his relationship with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company family when he was nine.

"I was hand-picked by Mr. Ailey himself during one of the company's arts and education outreach programs," Powell remembered. "They came to my elementary school and chose me to be part of their Arts Connection program." The young dancer was able to take two dance classes during the school day.

"I would take the bus down to the Ailey Studios for the classes and then ride the bus back to my school to finish the day," he said. In high school, Powell became part of Ailey's junior division and then moved up to the professional division.

"I joined Ailey II and eventually joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre," he said. "I had been there for 10 years before I became artistic director of Ailey II. So, it's been more than 30 years for me with the company." Powell was drawn to dance because he loves how the body moves.

"There was nothing like being able to put on music and express who I was in my house, in class, in rehearsal and on stage," he said. "When you're young and put music on, you dance around the house and are not worried about who is watching or who is judging.

"It was a great feeling, and when I found I could train and do this as a profession, I fell in love with it," Powell said. The company will share that love when it holds two master classes at the Eccles Center on Thursday, Nov. 1.

The first class will be held at 11 a.m. for South Summit High School dance students and the second will be at 1 p.m. for Park City High School dance students.

"I was fortunate to have dance come into my life through an outreach program and I feel it is very important with the dancers and the students to have that exchange wherever we go," Powell said. "There is nothing like learning from a real dancer in person, rather than through a YouTube video."

The classes are also a way for Ailey II to check and maintain the quality of artistry that served as the basis of the original company that was founded nearly 55 years ago. As the new artistic director, Powell knows he shoulders a huge responsibility.

"Of course it's expected to maintain the quality that Mr. Ailey and subsequent directors Sylvia Waters and Judith Jamison have set before me," he said. "When I took over Ailey II, the question was, 'What do I have to bring to the legacy?'

"My answer is that I've only lived and seen the vision of Alvin Ailey, Sylvia Waters and Judith Jamison," Powell said. "I can't change the tradition, which I don't want to, because it kept me going. But since the tradition is clear and already established, my goal is to just keep it fresh by bringing in new and young choreographers."

Powell also wants to pass on the tradition to the new company members.

"It's more about giving the dancers a history (as to) what they are dancing," he said. "Physically, these days, the dancers can do just about anything you ask them to do. And that's because of the training, which has evolved, but it's our responsibility to instill in them the idea of where the discipline originated and what is still driving it.

"I feel fortunate to have worked with Mr. Ailey and Ms. Jamison and I can work with the dancers of this generation to help them grow."

*The Park City Performing Arts Foundation will present Ailey II, the touring group of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, at the Eccles Center for the Performing Arts, 1250 Kearns Blvd., on Friday, Nov. 2, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets range from \$20 to \$67 and are available at [www.ecclescenter.org/upcoming-events/ailey-ii-friday-november-2-2012/](http://www.ecclescenter.org/upcoming-events/ailey-ii-friday-november-2-2012/) or by calling (435) 655-3114.*