

Alvin Ailey Dance Theater Crafts New Ballet to Recognize HIV/AIDS Epidemic

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By Yvette Caslin



Judith Jamison and Robert Battle.
Photo by Andrew Eccles

A marriage of words and images with dance is Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's gift to culture enthusiasts worldwide on this World AIDS Day, December 1, 2011. AAADT will minister to our souls the stories of those who are living with HIV/AIDS.

Ten first-place winners of the Bristol-Myers Squibb 2011 REYATAZ "Fight HIV Your Way" contest entries will serve as an inspiration for a new Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater work.

The new ballet titled "Home" will be choreographed by Rennie Harris and will live among the more than 350 ballets in the repertoire. A retired Judith Jamison, who graciously carries the title artistic director emerita since her retirement this past June, says, "to dance this situation, to choreograph these wonderful short essays and photographs that were reflective of their lives is a fabulous idea."

Artistic director Robert Battle concurs, "With his unique and contemporary perspective, Rennie Harris will bring to the stage these stories that must be told and ought to be recognized. The collaboration will be a celebration of many lives, and a driver of understanding and acceptance for those touched by HIV."

Jamison continues, "When [Bristol-Myers Squibb] approached us with this idea, to choreograph these wonderful short essays and images from these 10 winners that is reflective of their lives, whether they are living with HIV or doing something about HIV, is fabulous."

Our idea that modern dance should really celebrate our country, the fact that this ballet is so pointed in the direction of HIV and AIDS is quite on time as we celebrate Alvin's life. We celebrate his life of course every time that curtain goes up. The legacy that he left is tremendous."

Despite major advances since the early days of the HIV epidemic, and the first diagnosis 30 years ago, the most recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data shows that in the United States approximately 50,000 new infections occur each year and every nine and a half minutes someone new is infected with the disease.

"Bristol-Myers Squibb is energized by the level of engagement in this year's contest, and we are proud to be able to provide a channel for so many individuals impacted by HIV to share their personal stories," Raymond Sacchetti, senior vice president, U.S. Virology, Bristol-Myers Squibb offered in a press statement.

Ailey died on World AIDS Day in 1989 of an AIDS-related illness.