

## MIAMIAN IS NEW AILEY DIRECTOR

Written by KIMBERLY GRANT  
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When Judith Jamison announced to the dance world that she would be retiring in June 2011 as artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the question on everyone's mind was who would take her place. Since Ailey's passing in 1989, Jamison has helped guide Ailey's dance companies into a well-respected global theater enterprise.

According to Dan Lewis, dean at New World School of the Arts in Miami, there was a major search for the individual who would take over the artistic directorship of the Ailey Company. On Wednesday, April 28, Jamison finally named her successor: Robert Battle.

Battle, a graduate of New World and Juilliard School of the Arts, in New York, is a nationally known choreographer. He has taught countless master classes in high schools, colleges, and universities around the country, including New World.

Raised by his older cousin, Dessie Horne, whom he calls "Mom" and his great uncle, Willie Horne, Battle grew up in the Liberty City area. He practiced his craft in the back yard and spent his time after school asking his New World teachers for advice on his technique.

"I think it's great. He's an awesome representation of what can come out of (New World School of the Arts)," said Jamar Roberts, a dancer with the Alvin Ailey Company since 2002 and a New World Graduate, himself. "I think they made a really smart decision in choosing him."

Battle, an outside choreographer, has worked with the Alvin Ailey Company for a decade. He began with his work with the company when he created "Mood Indigo" for Ailey II, (one of the dance groups within the company) and then "Takademe" and "The Hunt" for the Ailey Company.

"There were no words to express how I felt," said Battle, 36, about the moment when Jamison told him that he would be the artistic director designate of the Alvin Ailey Company. "What I reflected on in that moment was that young dancer from Miami, sitting in the Jackie Gleason Theater and seeing the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater for the first time. I watched [the dancers] on stage with wide eyes and just awe."

One of the things Battle plans to accomplish is bringing in outside choreographers from Europe to work with the dance company.

Battle also stated his love of surprises. He wants to use choreographers who may not have been considered by the Ailey Company in the past.

He went on to say that he has the blessings of the higher ups in going forth with his plans of incorporating outside talent to the versatile dancers of the company.

"This is about as good as it gets in life," said Dean Lewis, who mentored Battle while he was a student at New World. "In the dance world, this is the position to have."

The Alvin Ailey Company is considered a premiere dance company and is known as a cultural phenomenon.

When asked if he ever thought he would achieve this monumental goal, Battle was quick to say, "I am humbled. I'm looking forward to the wonderful future of this company and this organization. But, I'm

feeling very much optimistic about exciting things to come.”

Jamison will stay on as artistic director of the dance company to help Battle transition into his new position. Battleworks, Battle’s own dance company, will be dismantled.

Come July 1, 2011, Jamison will become the artistic director emeritus. In the meantime, she is working with Battle to show him the ropes.

“There has always been this mutual respect between us and I’ve already learned so much from her. I’m ready to take the Alvin Ailey Company into the future,” Battle said.

One of the things that drew Jamison to Battle was that he reminds her of Alvin Ailey himself. Lewis agrees with this sentiment, as well, citing Battle’s similar jovial disposition and “wonderful vision” that mirrors the late Ailey.

Now that the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is approaching a new chapter in its legacy, the question on everyone’s mind is: “What next?”

Lewis, who saw Battle’s potential long ago as an awkward student and former martial arts practitioner, put it simply: “(Robert’s) now going to have a major effect on dance in America.”

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*Photo: Robert Battle*