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TheGrio's 100: Robert Battle, choreographer leaping to lead Alvin Ailey's dancers



In 2011, Robert Battle will assume his role as the third director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, a powerhouse studio with a 52-year history. A relative outsider to the Alvin Ailey institution, Battle spent the last decade cultivating a vibrant and exhilarating style of choreography at his own company, Battleworks. His distinguished body of work is sure to solidify his legacy in American dance.

Robert Battle is making history ... by leading an iconic dance studio onto its next stage. Before forming his own company, Battle trained at Juilliard and then performed with the Parson Dance Company from 1994 to 2001. It was with Battleworks, though, that he perfected his signature style, described by *New York Times* dance critic Alastair Macaulay as having "exciting effects, contrasts, the skill in showing several things happen at the same time."

The 2011 season will not be the first time Battle's work has graced the Alvin Ailey stages. Since 1999, nine of the choreographer's acclaimed pieces have been performed there. Outgoing artistic director Judith Jamison, who has guided Alvin Ailey for 20 years, characterizes the hiring decision as fresh and invigorating.

"Choosing Robert Battle is the giant leap I want to take to ensure that this company stays vibrant in the future," she said, according to a report.

What's next for Robert?

When he takes the helm at Alvin Ailey this summer, Battle will be responsible for a budget of \$26 million to oversee the main school, community classes, as well as company tours and outreach programs across the United States.

In his own words ...

"This company is a huge part of American history, not just African-American history," Battle told the *Miami Herald* in April. "As an artist, nothing can be greater than that responsibility. So I'm nervous, but I also feel... that everything in my life has led me to this point."

On black history ...

"I celebrate black history by living out my dreams, believing that I am only limited by my own will, and acknowledging (either through my dances or my choices) that I am an individual," Battle told theGrio. "Because of people like Alvin Ailey, Judith Jamison, and countless others who stuck their necks out, I can dream bigger dreams for me, and I have done so."

A little-known fact ...

Alvin Ailey's signature piece, *Revelations*, a three-part piece that interprets African-American history through dance, has been performed at the studio since 1960.