

## Judith Jamison Celebrates 20 Years As Ailey Company's Artistic Director

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Judith Jamison's home is on the stage. It is there where she has captured the hearts of audiences around the world and astonished them with her beauty and grace. Her career as a dancer spans more than 40 years, but it has been the two decades that she has directed the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater Company that brought her to the home of Vice President Joseph Biden and his wife, Dr. Jill Biden, on Mon., Feb. 1 for a celebration in her honor.

About 100 guests attended the reception that also served as a kick-off for Black History Month. The Vice President, in his remarks, acknowledged how fitting it was to celebrate the accomplishment of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre on the first day of the month-long celebration.

Dr. Biden said she met Judith Jamison when she attended an Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre celebration and performance at the Kennedy Center in the District in February, 2009. In October 2009, she visited the Alvin Ailey School in New York, where she met the dancers, visited classes and attended a student rehearsal. She decided then to tell Jamison that if she was ever in the Washington area, she wanted to invite her to her home.

The dance theatre is in Washington, D.C. this week to kick off its 20-city tour beginning with performances at the Kennedy Center, Feb. 2 through Feb. 7.

"What better thing for me as an educator than to have students and the people who are their heroes" together in the same room, Dr. Biden said.

Vice President Biden said he was not a lover of ballet. He has grown an appreciation for ballet because his wife has seen to it to introduce the art to her entire family, including the grandchildren, he said.

He complimented Jamison for her long history in dance, as well as the dance company's global reach. He noted that the Alvin Ailey dance company has been performing since 1958. They have traveled to 48 states and 71 countries, and performed for more than 23 million people. "You are more than a dance troupe; you're a cultural institution," he said. "You are one of our greatest national exports; representing the U.S. in countries around the world."

"You realize that dance is a gift to people everywhere," Biden said. "Thank for what you do."

Jamison has been a part of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company for 29 years. An extraordinary dancer with an impressive career both as a performer and a choreographer, Ailey took note of Jamison's talent and created a



Judith Jamison, artistic director for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, (left) accepted Vice President Joseph Biden and Dr. Jill Biden's invitation to visit the Vice President's residence in Northwest on Mon, Feb. 1. Jamison was honored for her life time achievements as an internationally-acclaimed dancer and for fulfilling Ailey's request to direct the theatre company when he passed 20 years ago. **Photo by Victor Holt**

repertoire just for her. Just before his death in 1989, Ailey asked Jamison to become Artistic Director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre. She accepted.

Twenty years later, Biden called Jamison's work "a continuation of [Ailey's] vision; taking it to new heights. He would be very proud of you."

Jamison, 66, broke through racial barriers in the 1970s when she became internationally recognized and when she became the first female African American artist to appear on the cover of Dance Magazine. Now, she is leading the company on a 20-city tour to commemorate her 20th year of service and to introduce "Dancing Spirit" a dance created for her. The title is taken from her autobiography that was edited by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis in 1993.

Twenty students and their instructors from the Duke Ellington School of the Arts were invited to attend the reception. They mixed and mingled with members of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company while munching on miniature sirloin burgers, Peking duck crepes, smoked salmon, cheese quesadillas and pear cups.

Steven Galberth, 16, of Northwest, thought it was a good opportunity to go to the Vice President's home. "It's a really good experience to be here and to meet so many great people," he said. His greatest desire is to one-day join the Alvin Ailey Company but for the time being he said, "Duke Ellington has given me many great and fun opportunities."

Brionna Edmundson, 17, 12th grade student majoring in dance major, said "It's an honor to be here with all of these talented people. I know about Alvin Ailey and every year we watch the company perform." When asked if she would ever want to join the company, she tilted her head back as if to gaze up to the stars, and she said, "It would be a dream come true."

Jamison called her journey with the dance company "bittersweet."

"Alvin Ailey left us physically 20 years ago, but his spirit remains in our hearts and you can see it every time the curtain goes up. It's about a love that Alvin had for the people, all people of all walks of life. That is dance; it's not just about the performance, but what happens before and after. It is a genuine sense of a responsibility to be great artists; and I have them in each individual." Jamison said.

In less than 15 minutes, the formalities were nearing the end. Jamison concluded by telling the Bidens, "We appreciate your service to our country. Thank you for being the teacher that you are," she told Jill Biden; and "thank you for being the leader that you are," she told the Vice President.