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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

10-Year Deal Links Ailey, City Center

By Pia Catton

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has performed at New York City Center since 1971, but the arrangement has not been formalized until now: Both parties will announce Tuesday that the troupe will become the venue's Principal Dance Company and will continue to perform its five-week winter season at City Center for the next 10 years.

"We've been talking about it off and on for many years," said the president and CEO of City Center, Arlene Shuler, who has led a major restoration of the Midtown theater that will be completed this month. "With the renovation, and the extension of our own programming, we thought it was an ideal time."

It also comes at a time when City Center has been hit by

something of a domino effect within the performing arts. In July, the Paul Taylor Dance Company announced that it would leave the venue, where it had performed since 1977. The company decided to take its annual season to Lincoln Center's David H. Koch Theater, which suddenly had more performance dates to offer after losing one of its primary tenants, New York City Opera.

"The Koch Theater is providing a new element of competition," Ms. Shuler acknowledged, "but each theater has its own personality and strengths."

That's something the Ailey Company will be able to test, because its agreement with City Center is not exclusive, meaning it can stage performances at other local venues. "It doesn't mean that we won't perform at the Koch, and we always per-

form at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center," noted Sharon Gersten Luckman, the executive director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation.

The company has formal agreements with other locations that it visits regularly. "We have long-term commitments to the

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Kennedy Center, Miami's Adrienne Arsht Center and Fox Theatre in Atlanta," Ms. Luckman said, naming just a few of the venues.

The 10-year commitment to City Center also comes with a

sweetener: The venue will contribute "major" financial support to Ailey for the creation of one new dance work in each of the 10 years.

Ms. Shuler, who declined to disclose a dollar figure, said City Center had been looking for ways to offer commissioning support to dance companies. Earlier this month, the venue announced that it had co-commissioned a new work for American Ballet Theatre, another company that has routinely performed there. "We had talked about creating a commissioning fund," she said.

"That's very meaningful to the dance community. It's especially meaningful to Robert Battle," Ms. Luckman said, referring to Ailey's new artistic director, who took on the role in July and is heading into his first year of leadership.