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Antonio Douthit, K. Boyd, and Yannick Lebrun  
Photo by Andrew Fozles



# The Beautiful Men of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

By Anywyone Ingram | Rafa Carvajal contributed to this story

"ALVIN HAS ALLOWED ME TO FIND A PART OF ME I MAY HAVE NEVER FOUND HAD I NOT BEEN GIVEN THIS CHANCE."  
-ANTONIO DOUTHIT



Yannick Lebrun and Antonio Douthit  
Photo by Andrew Fozles

Unifying the work of one's mind, body and spirit simultaneously, modern dance uses the body as an instrument of self-expression and prodigious emotion – glorifying "line, interdependence of bodies and the balance of the visual sculpture." At the turn of each century, modern dance has evolved into a spectrum of revolutionary works created by visionary and creative artists. Alvin Ailey, a pioneer in modern dance, formed the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1958, revolutionizing "African-American participation in 20th century concert dance." The company, under the direction of Ailey, began with a group of young African-American modern dancers with a vision to change the perception of American dance. Ailey drew upon his "blood memories" of Texas, incorporating the blues, spirituals, and gospel into his works. Fast forward 55 years later and the company has gone on to perform for an estimated 23 million people at theaters in 48 states and 71 countries on six continents. Now under the artistic direction of Robert Battle, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues to captivate audiences worldwide with its eclectic works of both past and present, accumulating more than 200 works by over 80 choreographers. *Wire Magazine* caught up with two of AADT's alluring and awe-inspiring dancers, Daniel Harder and Antonio Douthit, to talk inspiration, aspirations and what it means to be a part of a vital "Cultural Ambassador to the World."



# Interview with Antonio Douthit

**How did training at the Center of Contemporary Arts under the direction of Lee Nalling prepare you for the stage? Dancing at COCA was one of my highlights of my young dancing career. I learned from a host of different teachers and styles of dancing there. Training under Lee Nalling was and is a joy. I still find myself learning from her thirteen years later. The love and support she gives each of her students unbiased is just the thing I hope to pass on to my students when I begin the next chapter in my career.**

**Which ballets have been your favorites to perform in and why?**

If I could sum up my favorite ballets while I have been dancing with the company it would have to be Alvin Ailey's masterpiece *Revelations*. Its simplicity and beauty is what draws me to it. To dance it is a reward in itself. My other favorite would have to be the new staging of Ronald K. Brown's *Grace*. From the music to the way he moves us in the space is everything. It's one of those ballets I could never grow tired of dancing.

**Which role was the hardest for you to play?**

One of the hardest roles for me to take on in the company would have to be anything danced or choreographed by my former director Judith Jamison. She is the most detailed and musical person you will ever meet. Her coaching is tough and filled with tons of great information. Sometimes I leave the studio asking myself – did you get any of that?

**Where do you see your dance career 10 years from now?**

It's hard to answer where I see myself in 10 years as I live in the now and enjoy what I am doing while I can. Yes, we all know we can't dance forever so I hope that I can still have something to do with dance until the day I can't anymore.

**What does it mean to you to be a part of Alvin Ailey?**

It means everything to be part of this company. Alvin has allowed me to find a part of me I may have never found had I not been given this chance. I have made lifelong friends here and we share something on the stage that is intangible. It's just a surreal feeling to be a part of something so much larger than you.

**What roles will you be starring in for the remainder of 2013?**

I will be dancing in most of the ballets that will be on stage this season at some point. The challenge is changing your hat from ballet to ballet and making sure to stay true to each choreographer's unique vision. For example, on our opening night at the Arsht on Thursday, February 21, I will be moving from Jiri Kylian's classical and sensual *Petite Mort*, to the West-African influenced *Grace*, to the spiritual *Revelations*. I've also been enjoying leading the audience participation section of Ohad Naharin's inventive *Minus 76* – There's nothing quite like it – an amazing experience for the dancers and the audience!

**Were you always interested in ballet or did you train in other forms of dance before?**

I was just interested in dancing. Ballet was the base but I could never say I was a ballet dancer. I did hip-hop, jazz, and modern. I was even a cheerleader. I just loved to move. So all these different things made one large collage of the dancer I am.

**Who or what has inspired you to dance since the age of 16?**

Since I was 16 so many people have inspired me from Ray Parks, my high school dance teacher, to Robert Battle, the Artistic Director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Mentors like Judith Jamison, Arthur Mitchell and Masazumi Chaya. Believe it or not, I think I might learn the most from my peers.

**Describe your style of dance in 3 words.**  
Passionate, Sincere, Graceful.

**Is there anything else you would like to share with *Wire Magazine* readers?**

Come see the company at the Arsht Center or in a city near you and be open for an amazing time!

Antonio Douthit, Yemick Lebrun and K. Boyd  
in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*  
Photo by Andrew Eccles



**Photos by Paul Kolnik**

1. Antonio Douthit and Jamar Roberts in Artistic Director Robert Battle's *Strange Humors*.
2. Behind the Scenes of Robert Battle's *Tokademe*.
3. Antonio Douthit and Glenn Allen Sims in Alvin Ailey *Opus McShann*.

# Interview with Daniel Harder

**Growing up, who, or what, was the reason for your strong interest in the performing arts?**

According to my parents, I was always dancing. The minute I was able to crawl and walk, there was a groove going on in my body! I would say that my biggest influence growing up was music videos. I was a student of Michael and Janet Jackson. I learned every bit of their choreography until I thought I had it perfected. At age 9, I went to my first performance, which was a Janet Jackson concert, and that's when I knew I wanted to be a professional dancer.

**What was your experience like dancing in the European tour of *Westside Story*?**

Dancing in the European tour of "*West Side Story*" was an incredible experience. I was starting my senior year of college in the Ailey/Fordham BFA program, and got the amazing opportunity to take part in "*West Side Story*." We traveled to Germany, London, and Greece for 4 months. I learned a great deal about theater while in the production; what it means to embody a character and use song, dance, and drama to help tell a story. Those lessons definitely help me today when dancing the diverse repertory we have in the Ailey Company.



**What did it mean to you to be a member of Ailey II?**

Being a member of Ailey II was a dream come true. While a student in the Ailey school, you often hope that your hard work and dedication may afford you the chance to be selected for the second company. To be chosen by Ms. Sylvia Waters was a huge honor. She not only has a knack for finding talent, but she is great at nurturing it. Her generosity, compassion, and wisdom is remarkable. Ms. Waters helped me understand and embrace my gifts, strengths, and weaknesses, which I think helped make my transition in to the Ailey company that much easier.

**Thus far in your career, what moment (past or present) stands out to you the most?**

I think performing in the Opera House at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. for the first time has to be one of my most exciting moments. I had my first big performance with Debbie Allen at the Kennedy Center when I was 16. So, to come full circle and have the opportunity to perform in the historic Opera House with my Ailey family is a huge blessing, and one that I dreamed of for a LONG TIME!

**What advice can you give to our readers that may be aspiring dancers?**

There are two things I would tell aspiring dancers. The first would be to never stop learning. Learning is essential because it's how you grow and develop; not only as a dancer, but also as a human being. There is no such thing as perfection, but you can constantly blossom. The second thing I would tell them is to embrace what is unique about you. There are tons of talented dancers

in the world, but only one you. It's ok to have strengths and weaknesses, but we all have something divinely unique about ourselves. Honor it, and own it.

**Who or what inspires you to continue dancing?**

Life's experiences, love, spirituality, family, friends, music, and other dancers. All of these things inspire me to continue dancing.

**What show, production or festival was your favorite to perform in and why?**

I don't know if I have a favorite production or festival that I've performed in. One of the things that I love about the Ailey Company is that we are able to travel the world. Sharing what you love to do with audiences from all over is a great honor. It would be very hard to pick just one.

**Is there tons of competition between you and others in the industry? Does that provide additional motivation?**

There's always competition. I think as long as it's healthy competition, then it can definitely be motivating. In the dance industry, you live your life auditioning. Even in a company setting, you still have to audition for certain parts. One thing that I always try to remind myself is to not tear others down. It's ok to want the same part or accolades as someone else, but what is meant for you will be for you.

**Is there anything else you would like to share with *Wire Magazine* readers?**

Come see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the Adrienne Arsht Center from February 21-24. The company LOVES coming to Miami every year, and we are bringing lots of new and exciting work with us! Hope to see you all there!



Daniel Harder  
Photo by Eduardo Parina



The Company  
with Robert Battle and Masazumi Chaya  
Photo by Andrew Eccles



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-DANIEL HARDER