“THOSE CREATURES WERE BEYOND HUMAN...”
– The New York Times
Robert Battle, artistic director
Masazumi Chaya, associate artistic director

Company Members

Please see insert for tonight's program.

ALL ABOUT AILEY
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater grew from a now-fabled performance in March 1958 at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. Led by Alvin Ailey and a group of young African-American modern dancers, that performance changed forever the perception of American dance. The Ailey company has gone on to perform for an estimated 25 million people at theaters in 48 states and 71 countries on six continents – as well as millions more through television broadcasts. In 2008 a US Congressional resolution designated the Company as “a vital American cultural ambassador to the world” that celebrates the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience and the preservation and enrichment of the American modern dance heritage. When Mr. Ailey began creating dances, he drew upon his “blood memories” of Texas, the blues, spirituals and gospel as inspiration, which resulted in the creation of his most popular and critically acclaimed work, Revelations. Although he created 79 ballets over his lifetime, Mr. Ailey maintained that his company was not exclusively a repository for his own work. Today, the Company continues Mr. Ailey’s mission by presenting important works of the past and commissioning new ones. In all, more than 235 works by more than 90 choreographers have been part of the Ailey company’s repertory. Before his untimely death in 1989, Alvin Ailey named Judith Jamison as his successor, and over the next 21 years she brought the Company to unprecedented success. Ms. Jamison, in turn, personally selected Robert Battle to succeed her in 2011, and The New York Times declared he “has injected the company with new life.”

Robert Battle, artistic director

Robert Battle became artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in July 2011 after being personally selected by Judith Jamison, making him only the third person to head the Company since it was founded in 1958. Mr. Battle has a long-standing association with the Ailey organization. A frequent choreographer and artist-in-residence at Ailey since 1999, he has set many of his works on Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II, and at The Ailey School. The Company's current repertory includes his ballets Takademe and Unfold. In addition to expanding the Ailey repertory with works by artists as diverse as Aszure Barton, Ronald K. Brown, Jacqulyn Buglisi, Bill T. Jones, Wayne McGregor, Robert Moses, Ohad Naharin, Matthew Rushing, Hofesh Shechter and Christopher Wheeldon, Mr. Battle has also instituted the New Directions Choreography Lab to help develop the next generation of choreographers.

Mr. Battle’s journey to the top of the modern dance world began in the Liberty City neighborhood of Miami, Florida. He showed artistic talent early and studied dance at a high school arts magnet program before moving on to Miami’s New World School of the Arts, under the direction of Daniel Lewis and Gerri Houlihan, and finally to the dance program at The Juilliard School, under the direction of Benjamin Harkarvy, where he met his mentor, Carolyn Adams. He danced with the Parsons Dance Company from 1994 to 2001, and also set his choreography on that company starting in 1998. Mr. Battle then founded his own Battleworks Dance Company, which made its debut in 2002 in Düsseldorf, Germany, as the US representative to the World Dance Alliance’s Global Assembly. Battleworks subsequently performed extensively at venues including The Joyce Theater, Dance Theater Workshop, American Dance Festival and Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival. Mr. Battle was honored as one of the “Masters of African-American Choreography” by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2005, and he received the prestigious Statue Award from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA in 2007. Most recently, in 2014,

Bennett Rink, executive director

Major funding for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, American Express, BET Networks, Bloomberg, BNY Mellon, Diageo, FedEx Corporation, Ford Foundation, The Howard Gilman Foundation, The Hearst Foundations, Prudential Financial, Inc., The Shubert Foundation, Southern Company, Target, and Wells Fargo.

Alvin Ailey, founder
Judith Jamison, artistic director emerita
Kanji Segawa, Glenn Allen Sims, Linda Celeste Sims, Jermaine Terry, Fana Tesfagiorgis, Marcus Jarrell Willis

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he received an honorary doctorate from The University of the Arts. He is a sought-after keynote speaker and has addressed a number of high-profile organizations, including the United Nations Leaders Programme and the UNICEF Senior Leadership Development Programme.

MASAZUMI CHAYA,
ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Masazumi Chaya was born in Fukuoka, Japan, where he began his classical ballet training. Upon moving to New York in December 1970, he studied modern dance and performed with the Richard Englund Repertory Company. Mr. Chaya joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1972 and performed with the Company for 15 years. In 1988 he became the Company’s rehearsal director after serving as assistant rehearsal director for two years. A master teacher both on tour with the Company and in his native Japan, he served as choreographic assistant to Alvin Ailey and John Butler. In 1991 Mr. Chaya was named associate artistic director of the Company. He continues to provide invaluable creative assistance in all facets of its operations. Mr. Chaya has restaged numerous ballets by Alvin Ailey, including Flowers for the State Ballet of Missouri (1990) and The River for the Royal Swedish Ballet (1993), Ballet Florida (1995), National Ballet of Prague (1995), Pennsylvania Ballet (1996) and Colorado Ballet (1998). He has also restaged The Mooche, The Stack-Up, Episodes, Bad Blood, Hidden Rites and Witness for the Company. At the beginning of his tenure as associate artistic director, Mr. Chaya restaged Aliley’s For “Bird” – With Love for a Dance in America program entitled Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: Steps Ahead. In 2000 he restaged Aliley’s Night Creature for the Rome Opera House and The River for La Scala Ballet. In 2002 Mr. Chaya coordinated the Company’s appearance at the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree-lighting ceremony, broadcast on NBC. In 2003 he restaged The River for North Carolina Dance Theatre and for Julio Bocca’s Ballet Argentina. Most recently, Mr. Chaya restaged Pas de Duke, The River, Streams, Urban Folk Dance and Vespers for the Company. As a performer, Mr. Chaya appeared on Japanese television in both dramatic and musical productions. He wishes to recognize the artistic contribution and spirit of his late friend and fellow artist, Michihiko Oka.

ALVIN AILEY, FOUNDER

Alvin Ailey was born on January 5, 1931 in Rogers, Texas. His experiences of life in the rural South would later inspire some of his most memorable works. He was introduced to dance in Los Angeles by performances of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Katherine Dunham Dance Company, and his formal dance training began with an introduction to Lester Horton’s classes by his friend Carmen de Lavallade. Horton, the founder of one of the first racially-integrated dance companies in the United States, became a mentor for Mr. Ailey as he embarked on his professional career. After Horton’s death in 1953, Mr. Ailey became director of the Lester Horton Dance Theatre and began to choreograph his own works. In the 1950s and 60s, Mr. Ailey performed in four Broadway shows, including House of Flowers and Jamaica. In 1958 he founded Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to carry out his vision of a company dedicated to enriching the American modern dance heritage and preserving the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience. He established the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center (now The Ailey School) in 1969 and formed the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble (now Ailey II) in 1974. Mr. Ailey was a pioneer of programs promoting arts in education, particularly those benefiting underserved communities. Throughout his lifetime he was awarded numerous distinctions, including the 2014 Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of his contributions and commitment to Civil Rights and dance in America. When Mr. Ailey died on December 1, 1989, The New York Times said of him, “you didn’t need to have known [him] personally to have been touched by his humanity, enthusiasm and exuberance and his courageous stand for multi-racial brotherhood.”

JUDITH JAMISON, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR EMERITA

Judith Jamison joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1965 and quickly became an international star. Over the next 15 years, Mr. Ailey created some of his most enduring roles for her, most notably the tour-de-force solo Cry. During the 1970s and 80s, she appeared as a guest artist with ballet companies all over the world, starring in the hit Broadway musical Sophisticated Ladies, and formed her own company, The Jamison Project. She returned to Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1989 when Mr. Ailey asked her to succeed him as artistic director. In the 21 years that followed, she brought the Company to unprecedented heights – including two historic engagements in South Africa and a 50-city global tour to celebrate the Company’s 50th anniversary. Ms. Jamison is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, among them a prime time Emmy Award, an American Choreography Award, the Kennedy Center Honor, a National Medal of Arts, a Bessie Award, the Phoenix Award and the Handel Medallion. She was also listed in The TIME 100: The World’s Most Influential People and honored by First Lady Michelle Obama at the first White House Dance Series event. This year she became the 50th inductee into the Hall of Fame at the National Museum of Dance. As a highly regarded choreographer, Ms. Jamison has created many celebrated works, including Divining (1984), Forgotten Time (1989), Hymn (1993), HERE... NOW... (commissioned for the 2002 Cultural Olympiad), Love Stories (with additional choreography by Robert Battle and Rennie Harris, 2004) and Among Us (Private Spaces: Public Places) (2009). Ms. Jamison’s autobiography, Dancing Spirit, was edited by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and published in 1993. In 2004, under Ms. Jamison’s artistic directorship, her idea of a permanent home for the Aliley company was realized and named after beloved Chairman Joan Weill. Ms. Jamison continues to dedicate herself to asserting the prominence of the arts in our culture and she remains committed to promoting the significance of the Ailey legacy – using dance as a medium for honoring the past, celebrating the present and fearlessly reaching into the future.

MATTHEW RUSHING,
REHEARSAL DIRECTOR AND GUEST ARTIST

Matthew Rushing was born in Los Angeles, California. He began his dance training with Kashmir Blake in Inglewood, California and later continued his training at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. He is the recipient of a Spotlight Award and Dance Magazine Award and was named a Presidential Scholar in the Arts. He was a scholarship student at The Ailey School and later became a member of Ailey II, where he danced for a year. During his career Mr. Rushing has performed as a guest artist for galas in Vail, Colorado, as well as in Austria, Canada, France, Italy and Russia. He has performed for Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, as well as at the 2010 White House Dance Series. During his time with the Company, he has choreographed three ballets: Acceptance In Surrender (2005), a collaboration with Hope Boykin and Abdur-Rahim Jackson; Uptown (2009), a tribute to the Harlem Renaissance; and ODETTA (2014), a celebration of “The queen of American folk music.” In 2012 he created Moan, which was set on Philadanco and premiered at The Joyce Theater. Mr. Rushing joined the Company in 1992 and became rehearsal director in June 2010.
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470 Park Avenue South, 9th Fl. North, New York, NY 10016
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International Agent

ASKONAS HOLT LTD.

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“THE ENSEMBLE WAS DAZZLINGLY PRECISE AND POWERFUL”
– The Daily Telegraph
I grew up taking dance lessons and one of my favorite memories is taking a class in the Alvin Ailey Studio in New York City. The class was exhilarating, challenging, and uplifting – and, to be honest, I was a bit star-struck: this was the Alvin Ailey company, after all.

Many years later, I found myself connected to Ailey again, this time as a UNC professor teaching a First Year Seminar on eating disorders and body image. Through Arts@TheCore, I had the opportunity to work directly with these visiting artists in order to deepen my class’ engagement with the subject matter. Since we would be spending the semester reading, discussing, and researching body image, including our society’s emphasis on how our bodies look, connecting with members of the dance community where the focus on the body is both aesthetic and functional seemed to be a unique experiential opportunity.

As children, if we think of our bodies at all, we tend to focus on function – how fast we can run, how good we are at climbing trees – but this often gets lost in adolescence and adulthood with the shift to an appearance focus. Alvin Alley is an excellent antidote to this way of thinking. They are a dance company where the focus is primarily on body as strength, and they prioritize movement and narrative.

My class of 20 first year students took part in a movement class with Ailey dancer and North Carolina native Hope Boykin. She was the perfect teacher to this group of non-dancers: funny, clear and non-judgmental. At the start of the class many were, admittedly, stiff and did not appear very comfortable, but by the end they were all moving freely, more at ease in their bodies and in the space. We also attended Ailey’s performance at Memorial Hall, where the beauty of strength and narrative were visible in each piece. Afterwards, we participated in a post-performance Q&A with some of the dancers, where they shared their feelings about bodies and eating, stressing that food was seen as fuel rather than something to deprive yourself of.

At the end of the semester, my students told me that these experiences were a highlight of the course. I was beyond thrilled about it all and, even still, over 25 years from my first experience with Alvin Alley, a bit star-struck!

Anna Bardone-Cone is an associate professor of psychology at UNC-Chapel Hill where her research focus is eating disorders and body image.