



ArtSmarts

2004-2005 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

March 9, 2005 11:00am
Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teacher:

We hope you find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for what they will experience at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater school matinee. This guide, which complements the Dance Curriculum Guide, provides background information on the company, its artistic directors, and the history of modern dance. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater school matinee, which is specially designed for student audiences, will introduce a major American artistic institution, devoted to preserving the legacy and contributions of African American culture through contemporary dance.

Mondavi Center gratefully acknowledges the institutional donors supporting the Arts Education Program during the 2004-2005 Season of Performing Arts:



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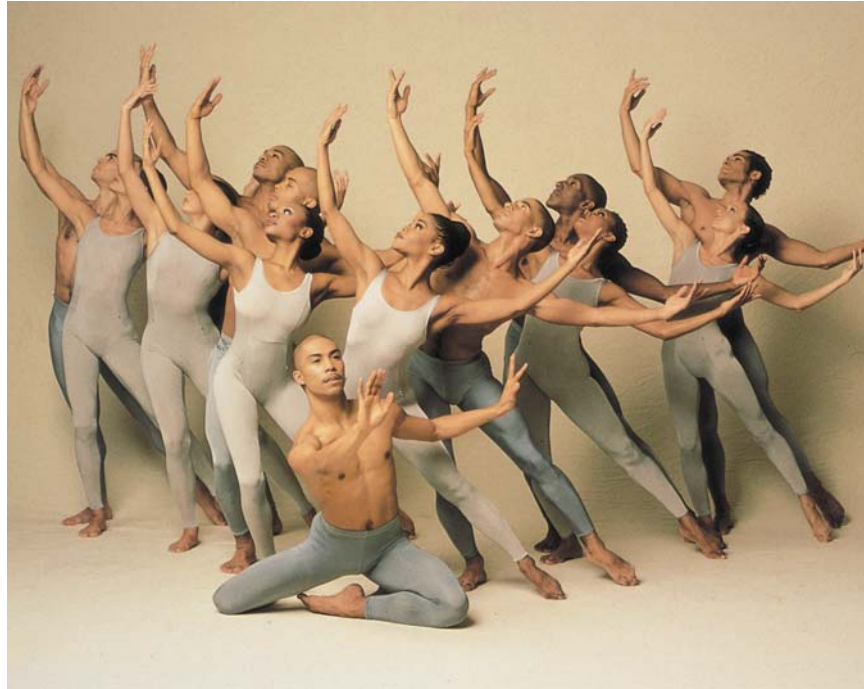


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With additional support provided by Teichert Foundation and UC Davis School/University Partnerships.

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER



One of America's most acclaimed international cultural ambassadors, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has delighted millions around the world since its founding in 1958. From its first performance, Alvin Ailey changed the way people view dance, the African-American aesthetic and music in America. Renowned for its soul-stirring, high-energy performances, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater brilliantly builds on the Ailey tradition and delves into intensely contemporary ground.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater sprung from a now-fabled performance that took place on March 30, 1958, in which Alvin Ailey and a group of young, black modern dancers performed at the 92nd Street Young Men's Hebrew Association in New York City. Alvin Ailey then became a household name through the company's successful New York seasons at City Center, national and international tours and television appearances. Dancers such as Judith Jamison, Dudley Williams, Clive Thompson, and Donna Wood established the impressive reputation of the Ailey dancer, setting a new standard for dance in the modern world. A living time capsule, Alvin Ailey's company and its repertory mirrored America and its changes, growing from a small, mostly black ensemble to a large multi-racial dance company. The company's audience has grown from the days of the station wagon tours to astounding numbers, reaching an estimated 19,000,000 people around the world. In the Fall of 1999, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater enjoyed the unprecedented honor of revisiting Johannesburg, South Africa to perform at the Civic Mondavi Center ArtSmarts pg. 2

Theater. The company's first visit there was in June of 1997, making it the first dance company to be invited twice in fewer than two years. They performed Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* using dance students from South Africa.

In association with V2 records, the Company has released two compact discs of music from the Ailey repertoire. *Revelations* and *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater: A Musical Retrospective on 40 Years of Dance* bring together blues, jazz, gospel, poetry, contemporary, folk, West African drumming, and R&B—music that has been fused with the brilliant choreography of the company. *Revelations* features music from what is perhaps Ailey's best known work while *A Musical Retrospective* highlights the diverse cultural inspirations behind other works from the Ailey oeuvre, with contributions from artists Otis Redding, Dizzy Gillespie, Donny Hathaway, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and Laurie Anderson.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater honors Ailey's vision of creating a company dedicated to the preservation of unique black cultural expression and the enrichment of the American modern dance heritage. Judith Jamison continues the legacy in her role as artistic director.



ALVIN AILEY, Founder

Alvin Ailey was born in Rogers, Texas on January 5, 1931 and moved to Los Angeles, California at the age of twelve. There, on a junior high school class trip to the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, he fell in love with concert dance. Inspired by performances of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company and classes with Lester Horton, Alvin Ailey began his formal dance training. It was with Lester Horton, the founder of the first racially integrated dance company in this country, that Ailey began his professional dance career. After Horton's death in 1953, Alvin Ailey became the director of the Lester Horton Dance Theater and began to choreograph his own works. In 1954, he and his friend Carmen de Lavallade were invited to New York to dance in the Broadway show *House of Flowers* by Truman Capote. In New York, Ailey studied with many outstanding dance artists, including Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey and took acting classes with Stella Adler.

In March 1958, Alvin Ailey assembled a group of young black modern dancers for a performance at the 92nd Street Young Men's Hebrew Association. That performance marked the birth of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater that has grown over the decades into one of the world's premier dance companies. Alvin Ailey had a vision of creating a company dedicated to the enrichment of the American modern dance heritage through the integration of black cultural expression. When Ailey began creating dance, he drew upon his "blood memories" of Texas, the blues, spirituals and gospel as inspiration. In 1960, he choreographed *Revelations*, the classic masterpiece of American modern dance based on the African-American religious heritage that he experienced in his youth.

Although he created 79 ballets over his lifetime, Alvin Ailey maintained that his company was not exclusively a repository for his own work. Today, the company continues Ailey's mission by presenting important works of the past and commissioning new ones to add to the repertoire. In all, more than 170 works by over 65 choreographers have been performed by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. In 1965, Ailey discovered a very talented young dancer named Judith Jamison whose brilliant dancing and style were the inspiration for a number of Ailey works. Judith Jamison was named Artistic Director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1989, the year of Ailey's death. Judith Jamison wrote in her autobiography, *Dancing Spirit*, "I hope I'm a continuation of Alvin's vision. He has left me a road map. It's very clear. It works."

JUDITH JAMISON, Artistic Director

Judith Jamison was asked to become artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater by Alvin Ailey before his untimely death. A native of Philadelphia, Jamison studied with Marion Cuyjet, was discovered by Agnes de Mille, and made her New York debut with American Ballet Theatre in 1964. She became a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1965 and danced with the company for 15 years to great acclaim. Recognizing her extraordinary talent, Alvin Ailey created some of his most enduring roles for her, most notably the tour de force solo *Cry*.

After leaving the company in 1980, Judith Jamison appeared as a guest artist with ballet companies worldwide and starred in the hit Broadway musical *Sophisticated Ladies*. In 1988, she formed her own company, The Jamison Project. A PBS special depicting her creative process, *Judith Jamison: The Dancemaker*, aired nationally the same year. As a highly regarded choreographer, Jamison has created works for many companies. *HERE . . . NOW.*, commissioned for the 2002 Cultural Olympiad of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games and Paralympic Games, is her most recent ballet. She choreographed *Double Exposure* for the Lincoln Center Festival in July 2000. *Divining* (1984), *Rift* (1991), *Hymn* (1993), *Riverside* (1995), *Sweet Release* (1996) and *Echo: Far From Home* (1998) are other major works she has choreographed for the company.

Judith Jamison is a master teacher, lecturer and author. She is a noted authority on modern dance and an advocate for education in the arts. Her autobiography, *Dancing Spirit*, was published in 1993. She is the recipient of many awards and honorary degrees, including an honorary doctorate from Howard University, a prime time Emmy Award, and an American Choreography Award for Outstanding Choreography in the PBS *Great Performances: Dance In America* special, *A Hymn for Alvin Ailey*. In December 1999, Jamison was presented with the Kennedy Center Honor, recognizing her lifetime contributions to American culture through the performing arts. Jamison carried the Olympic torch during the relay prior to the opening ceremonies in Salt Lake City in 2002. Most recently, President George W. Bush presented her with a National Medal of Arts, the most prestigious award presented to artists in the United States.

Today, Judith Jamison presides over a renewed Ailey organization, artistically and fiscally invigorated. Her presence has been a catalyst, propelling the organization in new directions: the development of the Women's Choreography Initiative; performances at the 2002 Cultural Olympiad and

the 1996 Atlanta Games; and two unprecedented engagements in South Africa. Jamison has continued Alvin Ailey's practice of showcasing the talents of emerging choreographers from within the ranks of the company. As Artistic Director of The Ailey School, official school of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, she has helped to implement a multicultural curriculum including salsa and the dances of West Africa and South India. She has also been a guiding force in establishing the Bachelor of Fine Arts program with The Ailey School and Fordham University, which offers a unique combination of superb dance training and a superior liberal arts education. Following the tradition of Alvin Ailey, Jamison is dedicated to asserting the prominence of the arts in our culture, spearheading initiatives to bring dance into the community and programs that introduce children to the arts. She remains committed to promoting the significance of the Ailey legacy.

PROGRAM

For the school matinee performance at Mondavi Center, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will perform an excerpt of *Shining Star* and *Revelations*. Below are descriptions of the two pieces.

SHINING STAR

(2004)
(Excerpt)

Choreography by David Parsons
Music by Earth, Wind & Fire*
Costumes by Ann Hould-Ward
Lighting by Howell Binkley

Linda Celeste Sims, Tina Monica Williams,
Venus Hall, Olivia Bowman, Hope Boykin,
Glenn Allen Sims, Clifton Brown,
Samuel Deshauteurs, Guillermo Asca, Clyde Archer

***Shining Star* was commissioned by Sandy Weill in honor of his wife Joan and her extraordinary commitment and dedication to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.**

This work was created through the Ailey New Works Fund, supported by **Altria Group, Inc.**

This work is supported by the Ailey New Choreography Initiative, sponsored by **AT&T.**

Shining Star was also made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency. Special support has been provided by the Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey through the generosity of the Arvin Gottlieb Charitable Foundation and the Muriel McBrien Kauffman Foundation.

Born in Chicago and raised in Kansas City, David Parsons enjoys a career as a performer, choreographer, teacher, director and producer. He was a lead dancer with the Paul Taylor Dance Company and in 1987 founded The Parsons Dance Company with lighting designer Howell Binkley. Mr. Parsons has created over 70 works for his company and received commissions from American Ballet Theatre, Paul Taylor Dance Company, New York City Ballet, Het Muziektheater in Amsterdam and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. His work has been performed by the Paris Opera Ballet, Joffrey Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theatre, English National Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance Company and BatSheva Dance Company of Israel, among others. Mr. Parsons is a recipient of the 2000 Dance Magazine Award. In 2001 he received an American Choreography Award for his work as a co-producer of *Aeros*, a production featuring the Romanian Gymnastic Federation which premiered on the Bravo Channel. In 1999, Mr. Parsons choreographed and directed the dance elements for Times Square 2000, the 24-hour festivities in New York celebrating the turn of the millennium.

Special Thanks to Verdine & Maurice White for their ongoing support.

*Music courtesy of Earth, Wind & Fire from the collection – Earth, Wind & Fire Greatest Hits

“Shining Star” (M.White-P. Bailey-L. Dunn) – published by EMI Music Publishing

“That’s the Way of the World” (M. White-C. Stepney-V. White) – published by EMI Music Publishing & Eibur Music

“Can’t Hide Love” (S. Scarborough) – published by Alexscar Music & Unichappell Music Inc.

“Gratitude” (M. White-C. Stepney-P. Bailey) – published by EMI Music Publishing

“September” (M. White-A.McKay-AWillis) – published by EMI Music Publishing & Steel Chest Music

“Fantasy” (M.White-E. del Barrio-V.White)-published by EMI Music Publishing 1998 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Manufactured by Columbia Records

REVELATIONS

MODERN DANCE

The roots of modern dance in the United States and Europe date back to the late 19th century and evolved as a protest against both the balletic and the interpretive dance traditions of the time. The forerunners of modern dance in Europe include **Émile Jaques-Dalcroze**, proponent of the eurhythmics method (where body movements represent musical rhythms) and **Rudolf Laban**, who analyzed human motion. A number of the modern dance movement's founders were American women. **Loie Fuller**, an American actress turned dancer, first gave the free dance artistic status in the United States. Her use of theatrical lighting and transparent lengths of China-silk fabrics won her acclaim from artists as well as general audiences. She preceded other modern dancers in rebelling against formal technique, in establishing a company, and in making films.

Dance was only part of Fuller's theatrical effect however for another American dancer, **Isadora Duncan**, it was the prime resource. Duncan brought a vocabulary of basic movements to heroic and expressive standards. She performed in thin, flowing dresses that left arms and legs bare. Her choreography of powerful, simple movements made an impression on dance that lasted far beyond her death.

Formal teaching of modern dance was more successfully achieved by **Ruth St. Denis** and **Ted Shawn**. St. Denis based much of her work on Eastern dance styles and brought an exotic glamour to her company. Shawn was the first man to join the group, becoming her partner and soon her husband. Non-balletic dance was formally established in 1915, when they founded the Denishawn school.

From the ranks of Denishawn members, two women emerged to initiate modern dance proper. **Doris Humphrey** emphasized craftsmanship and structure in choreography and **Martha Graham** opened up fresh elements of emotional expression in dance. Humphrey's dance technique was based on the motions of fall and recovery; Graham's on expressions of contraction and release. At the same time in Germany, **Mary Wigman**, **Hanya Holm**, and others were also establishing comparably formal and expressionist styles. As in Duncan's dancing, the torso and pelvis were emphasized as centers of dance movement. Horizontal movement close to the floor became as integral to modern dance as the upright stance is to ballet. In the tense, often intentionally ugly, bent limbs and flat feet of the dancers, modern dance conveyed certain emotions that ballet avoided. Furthermore, modern dance dealt with contemporary concerns in contrast to the formal, classical, and often narrative aspects of ballet.

A new revolt against Graham's expressionism was led by **Merce Cunningham**, who rejected psychological and emotional elements in choreography. Cunningham's dance technique began to incorporate as much ballet as it did modern dance, while his choreographic methods admitted chance as an element of composition and organization. Also in the 1950s, **Alwin Nikolais** developed productions in which dance was immersed in effects of lighting, design, and sound, while Paul Taylor achieved a generally vigorous and rhythmic style with great precision and theatrical projection in several works responding to classical scores.

Cunningham was a prime influence on the development of “postmodern dance” in the 1960s and later. In New York City, a large number of new dancers and choreographers began to abandon virtuoso technique, to perform in nontheater spaces, and to incorporate repetition, improvisation, minimalism, speech or singing, and mixed-media effects, including film. Out of this context emerged such artists as **Twyla Tharp**, who gradually reintroduced academic virtuosity, rhythm, musicality, and dramatic narrative to her dance style, which was based in ballet and yet related to the improvisatory forms of popular social dance.

Since its founding, modern dance has been redefined many times. Though it clearly is not ballet by any traditional definition, it often incorporates balletic movement; and though it may also refer to any number of additional dance elements (those of folk dancing or ethnic, religious, or social dancing, for example), it may also examine one simple aspect of movement. As modern dance changes in the concepts and practices of new generations of choreographers, the meaning of the term will certainly enlarge.

–Adapted from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*

THINK ABOUT IT!

Dear Students:

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas, ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) How would you describe an Alvin Ailey dance performance to a friend?

- 2) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?

- 3) Discuss the differences and similarities of modern dance and ballet.

- 4) How did the music and the costumes enhance the dance performance?

This CueSheet was written by ANETT JESSOP, Graduate Researcher, Davis Humanities Institute.

ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- * Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately;
- * Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- * Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- * Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- * Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- * Please turn off cell phones and pagers.
- * Flash photography is strictly prohibited.
- * Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best possible work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, such as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.