

Dance Magazine Awards 2021 – Honoring Those Who've Made Outstanding Contributions to our Field

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DANCE[®] magazine awards 2021

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As the performing arts emerge from the challenges of the pandemic, the Dance Magazine Awards celebrate those who have made our field even stronger. With the selection committee's continued focus on diversity, we honor the artistry, the integrity and the resiliency these living legends have demonstrated over the course of their careers. Join us to celebrate this outstanding group virtually or at the Guggenheim's Works & Process Theater on Monday, December 6, with performances and presentations for each honoree. Find tickets at dancemediafoundation.org.



Robert Battle reads
My Story to Dancers to
Alvin Ailey students
during the COVID-19

Robert Battle

Robert Battle once told an interviewer on PBS, "Something about movement, very early on for me, signified life." As a youngster, it wasn't likely that he would become a dancer; Battle's legs were so bowed he had to wear braces at night. However, once he no longer needed them, he made up for lost time by dancing every chance he could. When he wasn't dancing, he liked to don a bathrobe and pretend to preach, sharpening the oratorical skills that he now puts to regular use as artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Today, the warmth and charm of his pre-curtain speeches and interviews make not just Ailey but modern dance feel more accessible for all of us.

Diligent and talented, Battle trained at Miami's New World School of the Arts, then Juilliard. He danced with Parsons Dance before starting his own company, Battleworks. His choreography, including the iconic *Tahademe* and *The Hunt*, tends to be challenging, powerful, intriguing and sometimes offbeat. Many works are punctuated by movements evocative of his martial arts training.

When Judith Jamison passed the Ailey torch to Battle in 2011, the then-38-year-old became just the third artistic director of the historic dance company. Since then, Battle has

forged several pathways for other choreographers to flourish. Right away, Battle established the New Directions Choreography Lab, giving emerging artists the resources to create new works. Under his leadership, Ailey has also expanded its storytellers to include dynamic choreographers, such as Kyle Abraham, Azura Barton and Wayne McGregor. Outstanding dancemaker Jamar Roberts became the company's first resident choreographer in 2019. A year earlier, Battle had hired Rennie Harris as Ailey's first artist in residence; through Harris' works, such as the now-signature *Lazarus*, the Ailey company has further delved into the richness and diversity within African-American culture, and broadened the vocabulary with which it does so.

Battle often quotes Alvin Ailey, stating, "Dance comes from the people and should always be delivered back to the people." During Battle's tenure, the Ailey brand has remained synonymous with authenticity, artistic integrity, inclusive storytelling and culture of the highest quality. Through his steadfast grace, humility, wit and assiduousness, Battle has helped the Ailey company, 60-plus-years on, to continue evolving, flourishing and growing ever more popular. —Nadine Matthews ▶