



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Back On Stage After Pandemic Shutdown With Message Of Hope

By: Cindy Hsu
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NEW YORK (CBSNewYork) — The [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater](#) is back on stage performing in front of a live audience for the first time in a year and a half. The legendary dance company [held a gala Wednesday to celebrate the first performance](#) since [COVID](#) shut it down in March of last year. The dancers were out on the road and had to be called back when the pandemic hit. Slowly, they began dancing again — masked and socially distant, performing virtually.

“Millions of people tuned in and took classes and watched the digital content. I mean, we really stayed connected and found new ways to connect with new audiences,” artistic director Robert Battle told CBS2’s Cindy Hsu. Alvin Ailey founded the company back in 1958 on the brink of the Civil Rights Movement, and it’s endured more than 60 years.

One of the highlights of this season is Ailey’s masterpiece “Cry,” first performed 50 years ago by the legendary Judith Jamison. “It was a gift for his mother, because he couldn’t afford one. So he made this dance,” Battle said. The 16-minute solo takes the audience on a woman’s journey — from being a Queen in Africa, to being forced onto a slave ship and a life of servitude, but ending with her finding joy and resilience.

“In the program notes, it always says, ‘For Black women everywhere, especially our mothers.’ So I think it’s so wonderfully appropriate that we’re celebrating the 50th anniversary of this dance,” said Battle. “He was born in 1931. He lived in Rogers, Texas. She was a single mom who had to make a way out of no way. And to see him go on, and then to gift her with dance, I mean, how incredible.”

This season, audiences can also see several works created during the pandemic, including a piece called “Holding Space.” “Which really is about the way we’ve all had to hold space for ourselves and for each other during these horrific times. Not only including the pandemic, but racial reckoning and all of the things that have been going on,” Battle said.

And of course, “Revelations,” created in 1960 — a suite of spirituals that expresses the experience of African Americans in this country. “It is not just about entertaining, but also educating,” said Battle. “Alvin Ailey said it best. What he was really trying to do was hold a mirror to society, so that people could see how beautiful they are.”

Battle, who is celebrating his 10-year anniversary season as artistic director, said the goal is to uplift the audience with a universal message of hope. This season runs through December 19th.