

Chicago Tribune

Alvin Ailey Dancers show features South Elgin dancer Sarah Daley-Perdomo

By: Annie Alleman

February 18, 2022



A local dancer will perform for a hometown crowd when the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater comes to Chicago.

Sarah Daley-Perdomo, who grew up in South Elgin and graduated from St. Charles North High School, is a company member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and will perform at the Auditorium Theatre in Chicago March 2-6.

Daley-Perdomo, 35, started out in ballet when she was five years old and continued her training at the Faubourg School of Ballet in Hanover Park. "It was something I realized I had a talent for and wanted to see how far I could go," she said. Growing up, she thought she might go the route of classical ballerina, working her way up from the corps de ballet to the role of soloist and then principal dancer.

"In my training to go on the classical ballet route, my teachers introduced me to modern dance. They wanted us to be well-rounded," she said. "In about middle school, we started to go downtown from our suburban studio to the Auditorium Theatre and I remember distinctly going to see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

"After that first year, we had to make it a point to go every year when they came to town. That really opened my eyes to the world of modern dance. Not just that, but specifically the Ailey Company and a mixture of dances and the diverse makeup of the company itself and the mission of Mr. Ailey. After having experienced that I started to look up what this company was about." The experience influenced her college path; she went to the Fordham University at Lincoln Center in New York City, where they offered a partnership with Ailey School. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance and had the opportunity to take classes and train at the Ailey School. From there, she got into Ailey II in 2009 and two years later, the company.

"I always wanted to be onstage in a professional company," she said. "It was middle school when I first laid eyes on and experienced the magic that was Ailey on stage and that was something I really wanted to be a part of." She also trained at institutions such as the Kirov Academy, National Ballet School of Canada, the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance and intensives at Ballet Camp Illinois and Ballet Adriatico in Italy.

She is a recipient of a Youth America Grand Prix Award and an ARTS Foundation Award. "I always knew after high school I wanted to focus on becoming a full-time dancer so I thought that I might go from high school just to a professional dance company," she said. "My mom really wanted me to do the college experience and get a higher education and I'm grateful for that life experience, once; and two, it led me to Fordham and Ailey. Dance was always the thing that took the highest priority."

Some highlights of her career include performing the lead role in Ailey's "Night Creature" in 2020. "I just love that piece so much and getting to graduate from the corps roles to the lead role was something I was very excited and proud and honored to be able to do," she said. "Also, Lincoln Center at the Movies filmed a couple of our performances at New York City Center and I was able to perform a piece called 'Chroma' by Wayne McGregor and that had me living all of my contemporary ballet dreams out onstage.

"That's immortalized and it has been played in movie theaters and that's pretty surreal. I was able to hear from family members who actually got to go see it in theaters. It's nice to have something that's so permanent in an art form where everything is just what you put onstage that night. For me to be able to look back on, in my heyday, is a really cool thing.

"Probably the best of all is being able to perform for my family in the theater that we all used to go see this company onstage," she said. "This will be my 12th year doing that at the Auditorium Theatre and it still pulls at my heartstrings every time because it's such a big thing. It's really a dream realized."

The program in Chicago will include new productions and a world premiere, she said. The new productions are Ailey's "Pas de Duke," "Reflections in D" and excerpts from "The River," she said. The program will also include a new production of director Robert Battle's duet "Unfold," she said. "It will be a lot of new stuff that people haven't seen in the past few years in Chicago," she said. There are about 30 members in the first company of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The roles are interchangeable and each piece has a couple groups they call casts, she said.

"Each person knows two to three roles with ballet that we do," she said. "So one night I will go on and have maybe more of a featured role in let's say 'Revelations,' which is a piece that closes out all our performances on this tour. There's a lot of switching roles and tagging in and out. Everybody is required to wear many hats and know lots of different roles in all of these pieces."

When a dancer is in their hometown, they can expect to dance every night, she said. "I know that I will be doing a lot of dancing and seeing a lot of family," she said. "It's like a sigh of relief in being home and seeing familiar faces and also the pride that I feel in being able to perform for my family, especially my parents, who sacrificed so much and did so much to get me where I am and believed in me. It's like a range of emotions. The overwhelming feeling is joy in being able to do what I love in front of the people that I love and have them support me and the company as a whole." She knows there is an audience who waits for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to return to Chicago each year because she was once one of those excited audience members.

"It's new and different from some of the dance companies that you might see," she said. "I think there is an excitement we bring to the stage no matter what it is that we're doing. I know that is infectious because I felt it myself."

"But now that I'm literally on the other side of the curtain, I feel it as a conversation between us and the audience. That's a feeling that people remember and they keep coming back. And I think every year we bring in new people, we expand our reach and grow the Ailey family and fan base."

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

When: 7:30pm March 2-4; and 8pm March 5; and 3pm March 6

Where: Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Ida B Wells Drive, Chicago

Tickets: \$48-\$656

Information: 312- 341-2310; auditoriumtheatre.org