

VOGUE

Alvin Ailey's Opening Night Gala Paid Tribute to the Late Judith Jamison

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The world lost a great artist, but we did not lose her spirit,” said Phylicia Rashad of Judith Jamison, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's late artistic director emerita. At last night's Opening Night Gala for the dance company, Rashad served as honorary co-chair alongside Gayle King and paid special tribute to Jamison: “Just as sure as if she was standing here, we feel Judith Jamison's strength and resolve, and we know what she would be saying. She would be saying ‘keep dancing, keep striving, keep teaching, keep reaching.’” And that, we certainly did.

The night celebrated all the work Ailey's 32 dancers have put into the 2024-25 season but also honored the dancers who came before them. Rashad continued, “Even as we celebrate these spectacular dancers on the stage, we recognize the debt of gratitude that we owe each dancer who has passed through this organization. We feel the power of that connection, the lineage, the legacy of debts and we pay that debt gladly with our gifts, Alvin Ailey, Judith Jamison and all the artists who have joined in this labor of love have placed with us a sacred trust that we make this work possible.”

The night placed great emphasis on the larger dance community—from those who continuously support Ailey's endeavors with donations to those who support dance education and community programming. One such luminary is Jody Gottfried Arnhold, who this year's gala honored. “If you have enjoyed dance in New York City, chances are that [Arnhold] was at the heart of it; not boastfully, not loudly, but so often behind the scenes,” Laurie Cumbo, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of New York, said in a moving speech, nodding to Arnhold's support. The founder of 92NY's Dance Education Laboratory, along with additional dance curriculum at Hunter College and Teacher's College at Columbia University, Arnhold is a firm believer in the positive influence dance has on one's life. “[Mr.] Alvin Ailey believed dance came from the people and must be delivered back to the people,” Arnhold said, taking the stage. “[He] and Judith Jamison were way ahead of their time. They knew that the future of dance depends on dance education, depends on educating the next generation. They knew there is no dance without dance education. That's the core of my mission dance for every child.”



With speeches completed, the night moved seamlessly into performances of Ailey classics like *Cry*, a tribute to Jamison and *Grace* featuring live vocals by Leslie Odom, Jr. and Cécile McLorin Salvant. No opening night gala is complete without *Revelations*—Ailey's most popular work—featuring live vocals, of course, all of which received a well-earned standing ovation. Energized by these moving performances, guests made their way from the New York City Center to the Ziegfeld Ballroom for dinner, dancing, and mingling. Photos were taken, glasses were clinked, and smiles were seen until midnight, when the festivities came to an end. With over \$2.2 million raised for new works, scholarships, and education programming, it's clear, 2025 will be a stellar year for Ailey—and the entire dance community.

