



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's new artistic director calls role a full-circle moment

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UPPER WEST SIDE, Manhattan (WABC) -- The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's holiday performances begin in about three weeks, with a new artistic director leading the way.

Alicia Graf Mack fills the giant shoes of the late great Judith Jamison. Mack was once a principal dancer under Jamison.

She talked to Eyewitness News about her new role, which she calls a full-circle moment, and her vision for the future of the treasured theater.

"Ailey was always the north star, to come back now feeling prepared, ready, honored, I couldn't be more happy," Mack said.

The 46-year-old is only the fourth person to take on the prestige role of artistic director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, following in the foot steps of Robert Battle, Mack's mentor, the late Judith Jamison, and legend Alvin Ailey, who founded the company in 1958.

"We are simply enlarging his vision with new voices, fresh ideas, but always holding onto the aesthetic of identity, power, presence, beauty and the resilience of the human spirit," Mack said.

She started dancing when she was just 2 and half years old, and at 17, she joined the Dance Theater of Harlem, studying under Arthur Mitchell.

"To have trained your whole life towards a dream and start to see it coming to fruition is an incredible affirmation of life," Mack said.

Mack, a Columbia University graduate, who also went to Washington University, tried but couldn't land auditions with several major ballet companies.

"I've had many roadblocks, and times in my life when dance wasn't a possibility, because I've had an autoimmune disease, I've had several injuries," Mack said.

Still, she persevered, performing with Ailey, and running the dance division at Juilliard, all while treasuring pearls of wisdom from Jamison.

"She always talked about her dancers as if we were the stars of the world," Mack said. "She was my blueprint for me, she carried herself with such grace and integrity."