

EL DIARIO

Desde 1913, El Campeón de los Hispanos

Latin rhythms are part of the new season of Alvin Ailey

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The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre kicked off its annual season at New York City Center, the first under the leadership of Alicia Graf Mack, which will run from this week until January 2026.

And while this historically African American company has always been a symbol of excellence in modern dance, its present is deeply marked by the presence and talent of Latino artists who find here a home for their identity and their movement. Among them are Afro-Brazilian dancer Leonardo Brito and AILEY Extension mambo instructor Katherine Jiménez, two voices that represent the cultural and spiritual expansion of Alvin Ailey's legacy.

For Brito, arriving in New York was a mixture of determination and survival.

“There’s a lot of dance in Brazil, but professionally there wasn’t a place for someone like me. I did ballet, samba, capoeira, but I felt like I didn’t fit in. When I won the scholarship to The Ailey School, I knew that was my opportunity. I washed dishes until two in the morning, and by eight I had to be dancing. I didn’t speak English; I learned it by reading notes in the kitchen where I worked. That first year was the hardest of my life, but I never doubted that this was my place,” said Brito.

That mix of culture and experience ended up shaping his style within the company.

“My dance is dramatic, intense, almost theatrical. That comes from how many Latinos grew up: soap operas, carnival, samba, capoeira. All of that is in my body. And when I arrived at AILEY, I understood that my identity wasn't an obstacle, but an asset. Here they value that we come with history, with rhythm, with roots,” the artist mentioned.



The spiritual bond with AILEY also marked him deeply.



“AILEY honors African American history, but also celebrates the universality of our Black roots in the diaspora. I grew up practicing Candomblé, and when I saw in a Whitney exhibit that Mister Ailey had poems dedicated to the Orishas, I felt like I belonged. I felt like my story was also part of this legacy,” Brito commented.

This season he is performing works such as “Revelations” and “Jazz Island”, by Cuban-American choreographer Maija García.

“It’s beautiful to bring Latin culture to the stage. In this piece, I can include samba, capoeira steps, and the choreographer embraces

it. It's dance, but it's also theater, storytelling, the Caribbean. The piece breathes Latinidad," Brito explained. While Brito takes center stage, at the AILEY Extension studios, Afro-Latina instructor Katherine Jiménez transforms each mambo class into an act of collective memory. Born and raised in New York, her approach blends technique, history, and community.

"For me, mambo isn't just about steps. It's heritage, it's neighborhood, it's family. It's how our grandparents celebrated and survived. When I teach, I don't strive for perfection; I strive for freedom. I tell my students: this studio is yours too. You don't need to be a professional dancer to move your history. Every step comes from generations who used dance to resist, to heal, to come together," Jiménez explained.

His role at AILEY Extension, he says, is a natural extension of Alvin Ailey's legacy.

"AILEY democratizes dance. People of all ages, body types, and accents come here. And as an Afro-Latina instructor, it's important for them to see that their culture is represented. When students feel that connection, they understand that they belong here too," the instructor commented.

Both Brito and Jiménez agree that the company's future is promising under the leadership of Alicia Graf Mack.

"She is an incredible teacher, mother, and artist. I think her leadership will be very special. We are all excited, but in a good way. She is going to take AILEY to a beautiful place," Brito stated.

Leonardo Brito has a special word to describe the company: "AILEY is axé: life, spiritual strength, blessing. It's a word from the African diaspora that we use in Brazil to energize ourselves and celebrate. That's the spirit of this company," he said.

At AILEY, dance is identity. And thanks to artists like Brito and Jiménez, that identity is also deeply, proudly, Latin.

For tickets to this season of AILEY at New York City Center, visit: ailey.org

