

VOGUE

Alvin Ailey's Opening Night Gala Ushered in a New Chapter

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On Wednesday evening, hundreds of dance-lovers and patrons of the arts made their way to the New York City Center theater on West 55th Street for the Alvin Ailey Opening Night Gala—helping to kick off Alicia Graf Mack’s inaugural season as artistic director in style.

Graf Mack, who joined Ailey in July, is only the fourth artistic director in the company’s history, following in the footsteps of Ailey himself, the legendary Judith Jamison, and Robert Battle. As the curtains rose, it was evident that she’s already settled into the role with aplomb. “Tonight marks more than an opening night. It is a continuation of a dream that began 67 years ago in the heart and mind of one visionary man: Alvin Ailey,” Graf Mack said amidst rapturous applause as she graced the stage in an elegant halter-neck gown. “I am here to share our authentic identities, our stories, our beauty, our advocacy, and the rich diversity of movement languages that speak directly to the soul.”



The program opened with a rendition of *Blink of An Eye*, featuring a live violin solo by Grammy Award-winning virtuoso Melissa White. “This work builds upon the aesthetic we know and love, yet it also reflects a new era, one propelled by fresh energy, bold imagination, and out of this world virtuosity,” Graf Mack had told the audience. “As we celebrate new voices, we also honor the giants whose footsteps guide us.”

As anyone who has ever witnessed the company’s dancers in action will tell you, Alvin Ailey performances are mesmerizing; perhaps because they’re full of contradictions. Controlled, yet fluid. Swift, yet precise. Modern, yet historical. These artists have a way of moving and commanding the stage that’s unlike any other. On Wednesday, that caliber of innate talent was as clear as ever, and the crowd could not take their eyes off the stage.



It is this captivating kinetic language that Ailey embodied and preached, and decades later, his legacy is thriving. “Every time our dancers take the stage, every time a child walks into the Ailey School, every time a community is transformed by our arts and education programs, Mr. Ailey’s dream comes alive again,” Graf Mack agreed. In thanking the company’s ardent supporters, she emphasized that she plans to dedicate her tenure to both honoring Ailey’s past while looking towards the future.



The second performance, *A Case of You*, was familiar to many attendees as a Judith Jamison original that premiered in 2004. What they might not know is that Jamison had once tapped Graf Mack to perform in the duet. “Judith led with grace, grit, and with an unwavering love that lifted all of us,” Graf Mack said of her late mentor, who passed away in November 2024. “I feel her presence with me each day, and I remain profoundly grateful for everything she left us to celebrate.” This new revival production was accompanied by a stirring rendition of the Joni Mitchell classic, sung by five-time Grammy Award-winning jazz artist Samara Joy.

To introduce the finale, Ciara, who served as honorary chair for the gala, took to the stage in a shimmering power-shouldered black dress. The singer-songwriter described *Revelations* as a cultural treasure: “A bridge connecting generations across six continents, touching millions of hearts with its beauty and truth.” Compounding its emotive effect, it was brought to life in a whole new

way with the sounds of a choir. Guests, visibly moved by the riveting performance, joined together for a minutes-long standing ovation.

The electrifying energy carried onwards to a seated dinner held at the nearby Ziegfeld Ballroom, where faces from the worlds of entertainment, media, business, and philanthropy dined on filet mignon and danced to a live band. The inspiring evening also set the tone for how the Alvin Ailey season will go. "Alicia, your vision is already lighting up the path ahead," Daria L. Wallach, chair of the Ailey board of trustees and the event's honoree, praised. "Cheers to the power of movement, to over 65 years of art that has reflected who we are, and helped us imagine who we can become. Here's to the artists brave enough to create, bold enough to speak, and graceful enough to move us all."

