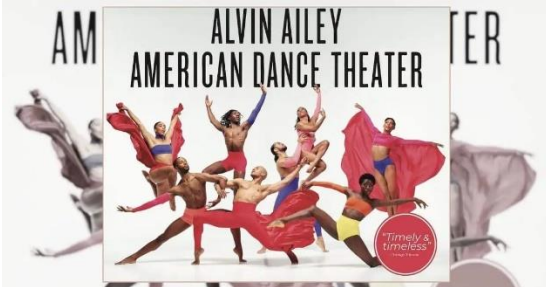


Englewood native and Alvin Ailey principal has seen the world, set to retire

By: Elaine Hegwood Bowen, M.S.J.

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Vernard J. Gilmore is an Englewood native whose career has seen him dancing in places all over the globe.

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater principal took time out to chat with the Chicago Crusader in anticipation of his retirement and a grand tribute to the late Judith Jamison, who danced with the Company from 1965 through 1980—later becoming the Company's Artistic Director from 1989 through 2011.

Alvin Ailey is one of the world's most popular dance companies, and its Chicago season will feature two programs packed with premieres held at The Auditorium March 7-9; for four performances only.

The Alvin Ailey Company presents a fusion of modern dance, ballet, jazz and hip-hop, with influences from African American culture.

Gilmore has performed since 1997 with Alvin Ailey. He graduated from Curie Performing and Creative Arts High School before studying at the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theater and then moving to New York City.

He received first place in the all-city NAACP ACT-SO competition in 1993 and attended Barat College. He then studied as a scholarship student at The Ailey School and was a member of Ailey Company II.

Gilmore discussed the first time he met Jamison. "I had read her book 'Dancing Spirit,' and I was watching a rehearsal of the first Company, and she chastised me because I wasn't supposed to be near that rehearsal studio. It was a very scary moment," he said. "But I understand because Jamison was very protective of the dancers." And the rest is history.

Currently the longest tenured Company Member, Gilmore has been called out for "dancing especially beautifully this season" by The New York Times.



For his farewell Ailey at The Auditorium engagement, he will be featured in every performance!



"Auditorium audiences welcome Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater with great enthusiasm each Spring, knowing a joyful experience awaits, and this year's programming will be no exception. In this, the Company's 56th visit to The Auditorium, we are saddened by the recent passing of the legendary Ailey dancer and Artistic Director, Judith Jamison, with whom we collaborated many times, but are pleased to pay tribute [to her]," said The Auditorium CEO Rich Regan.

This weekend's program is led by Interim Artistic Director Matthew Rushing and embraces the passionate spirit and extraordinary technique of Ailey's dancers.

Gilmore is a certified Zena Rommett Floor-Barre instructor and teaches workshops and master classes around the world. He explained that this is a body alignment technique where you understand how the body works in its most efficient manner.

When asked about his career and dancing in illustrious places, Gilmore was pensive and couldn't pick just one city.

"I've been everywhere. A kid from the South Side of Chicago, and I got to see the world. Whether it was Paris or South Africa. Japan and all these wonderful places across Europe. It's been a great learning journey. Mr. Ailey wanted us to get out in the world and bring something back to the States."



He credited his mom with pushing him and encouraging his artistic interests, as well as his village. "My mom was into dance and she was taking dance classes. I was always around dance. Those pillars of my village helped me to get these things."

He added: "My teachers were awesome at Curie, and this is where I saw the first video with Alvin Ailey."

Gilmore says when teaching young men to dance, and in his life, he uses a quote from Jamison as his guiding principle: "Hold onto the past, live in the present and reach fearlessly into the future."

With these Chicago performances, Gilmore hopes audience members can see themselves, that they are changed. "Come in out of the cold and feel the heat [as Alvin Ailey would say]. Feel comfort, enlightened and changed in some way. Dance is that universal language and such a powerful tool."

Included among the works on tap for the Ailey at The Auditorium are "Sacred Songs," "Finding Free" and "Treading." Also "Grace," "Cry" and "Revelations," as well as children's performances and ballet.

Alvin Ailey's "Cry" pays tribute to Jamison on opening night only, while Ailey's masterpiece "Revelations" concludes both programs.

Since its debut in 1960, "Revelations" has been acclaimed around the world for sending hearts soaring and lifting audiences to their feet, with its perfect blend of reverent grace and spiritual elation.

An intimate reflection of Ailey's childhood memories of growing up in the South and attending services at Mount Olive Baptist Church in Texas, "Revelations" pays homage to the rich cultural heritage of the African American community and explores the emotional spectrum of the human condition.



Take a look at a short video from "Cry," a performance dedicated to the late Alvin Ailey Artistic Director Judith Jamison.