



Renowned dance theater hosts free class for Altadena seniors

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April 2, 2025



Watch here: <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/renowned-dance-theater-hosts-free-class-for-altadena-seniors/> (2:45)

Out of all the parts that made 76-year-old Vivien Fortunaso fall in love with her Altadena home, the garden was the one that she was most proud of.

The Australia native chose Altadena as her permanent home in 1991 after a short stint in London.

"Really friendly people," she said. "It's a very, very diverse community, which is why we like Altadena.

She and her partner just finished a remodel with a dream kitchen overlooking the tranquil garden and the trail.

"This became a really special place of us," Fortunaso said. "It's really hard to lose it."

Fortunaso said that life has been a blur ever since the Eaton Fire destroyed their beloved home — at least, until recently. A few weeks ago, the renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater invited Fortunaso and several other seniors who lost their homes to a free dance class.

"Mr. Ailey believed dance came from the people and it should be given back to the people," teacher Aaron Thomas said.

Ailey is known as the father of African American modern dance. He used movement to express his history of growing up poor in the Deep South.

"We're hoping to take the personal stories for all of our seniors and friends who join us, and be able to take those experiences and turn it into something beautiful," Thomas said.

The class began with a simple, seated warmup. Fortunaso reunited with her neighbor as they followed each movement carefully. The group focused on the theme of resilience, using word association to create special movements. They also learned some choreography from Ailey's ballet masterpiece, *Revelations*, which explores grief, joy and hope.

During the exercise, Fortunaso unexpectedly began to cry after the class gave her the opportunity and permission to not only heal but to feel.

"Hoping to have some fun, to be honest with you, and a distraction," she said. "This just released my sadness and my loss."

The unforgettable, therapeutic experience erased the blur surrounding her life since the fire.

"I think I'm going to more of it," Fortunaso said. "I think I'm going to go home and dance."