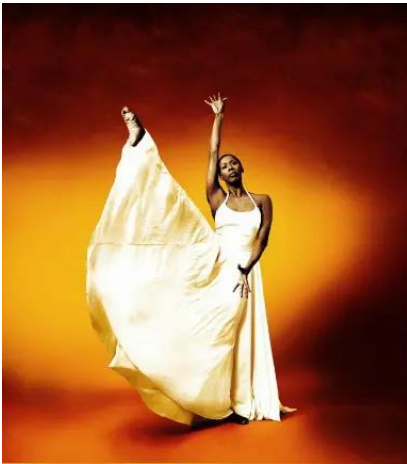


NYC Honors Legendary Dancer, the Late Judith Jamison, with Proclamation and Day

By: Kelly Garreau

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The late Judith Jamison, a transformative figure in modern dance at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, was honored with a resolution designating May 10 as Judith Jamison Day, an annual recognition of her artistic brilliance, cultural impact, and leadership.

The date now stands as an annual tribute to a woman who reshaped the possibilities of performance and empowered generations of dancers after it was passed by the City Council on May 1.

As the troupe's artistic director, she played a key role in steering the city's largest dance company into its new state-of-the-art home in 2005 at the 87,000 sq. ft Joan Weill Center on the West Side. The center includes 12 dance studios, a flexible performance space with seating for up to 295 people, a costume shop, physical therapy facilities, lounges, and administrative offices.

In a nice twist, the company's HQ in Hell's Kitchen at 9th Avenue and West 55th Street on the site of the former WNET-TV studios, where the Company's first television appearance took place in the early 1960s.

Council Member Gale A. Brewer counted Jamison as a personal friend. "Judith was a force, Beyond a force, really," said Brewer. "On a personal note, she was a friend. We worked together on the street co-naming of Alvin Ailey Place, first on 61st Street between West End and Amsterdam, then at 55th Street and 9th Avenue. To get the signs up was a challenge for whatever reason so she attended Community Board meetings with me and we got it done together."

Brewer recalled that "Judith wore the most gorgeous sneakers after years of dancing had damaged her feet. I've been supporting Alvin Ailey for a very long time, more than 20 years, and saw Judith often at Alvin Ailey dinners, meetings and celebrations. She is truly deserving of this honor."

Downtown Council member Carlina Rivera, who actually introduced the city council resolution was equally effusive, calling Jamison "a visionary artist and leader who left an indelible mark on our city and the world. Her commitment to excellence raised a new generation of brilliant artists and elevated modern dance to new heights."



Born in Philadelphia in 1943, Jamison began dancing at a young age, encouraged by her parents. She trained at the Judimar School and the Philadelphia Dance Academy, building a strong foundation in both technique and expression.

In 1964, while working at the New York World's Fair, the 21-year-old Jamison auditioned for a TV show. Though not selected, Alvin Ailey witnessed her performance and soon invited her to join his company. She accepted, beginning in 1965 a groundbreaking career.

Her performance in *Cry* a solo dedicated "to all Black women everywhere, especially our mothers" became a signature work. Its emotional depth and intensity helped establish Jamison as a commanding international presence in dance.



Following Ailey's death in 1989, Jamison became the company's artistic director. For 21 years, she expanded its global presence, supported new choreographers, and led the creation of The Joan Weill Center for Dance Ailey's permanent home in Manhattan. Through it all, she remained committed to celebrating the Black cultural experience through dance.

The May 1 proclamation event gathered civic and cultural leaders, all of whom spoke to her impact on the city and the world. Council Member Carlina Rivera, Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries, said: "Judith Jamison was a visionary artist and leader who left an indelible mark on our city and the world. Her commitment to excellence raised a new generation of brilliant artists and elevated modern dance to new heights. I'm proud to have passed a resolution designating May 10 as Judith Jamison Day, honoring her legacy that will continue to inspire future generations of dancers and creators. Together, we celebrate and reflect on Judith's legacy, whose passion and artistry will continue to resonate within and beyond the dance world,"

Council Member Gale A. Brewer reflected on their personal connection: "Judith was a force. Beyond a force, really. On a personal note, she was a friend. We worked together on the street co-naming of Alvin Ailey Place, first on 61st Street between West End and Amsterdam, then at 55th Street and 9th Avenue. To get the signs up was a challenge for whatever reason so she attended Community Board meetings with me and we got it done together. Judith wore the most gorgeous sneakers after years of dancing had damaged her feet. I've been supporting Alvin Ailey for a very long time, more than 20 years, and saw Judith often at Alvin Ailey dinners, meetings and celebrations. She is truly deserving of this honor"



Bennett Rink, Executive Director of AILEY, highlighted her leadership: "She picked up the torch from Mr. Ailey and carried it forward... We are so grateful to the City Council for the resolution celebrating Judith Jamison Day annually on the birthday of one of New York's greats."

Her passing on November 9, 2024, marked the end of an era—but her legacy lives on, not just in the performances she created or inspired, but now officially, in the heartbeat of the city that called her one of its own.