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ALVIN AILEY
AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER ANNOUNCES DECEMBER 2 OPENING NIGHT GALA WITH MULTIPLE GRAMMY AWARD-WINNING ARTIST SZA AND AWARD-WINNING FILMMAKERS SPIKE LEE AND TONYA LEE AS HONORARY CHAIRS

One-Night-Only Program Debuts *Power of Love* Tribute to Music Icon Luther Vandross Choreographed by Jamar Roberts

Celebration Launches Five-Week Holiday Season at New York City Center, December 2 – January 3

Tickets Now on Sale!

NEW YORK — updated November 11, 2026 — On **Wednesday, December 2,** **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater** will raise the curtain on its 2026-27 season at a dazzling Opening Night Gala with **multiple Grammy Award-winning artist SZA and Award–winning filmmakers Spike Lee and Tonya Lee as Honorary Chairs**. Kicking off the company's **five-week holiday engagement at New York City Center**, the gala begins with a 6:30pm one-night-only program featuring the world premiere of ***Power of Love*** in honor of music icon Luther Vandross, followed by dinner and dancing at the **Ziegfeld Ballroom**.

"I am so proud and excited to be opening our season with a major new collaboration inspired by Luther Vandross, a groundbreaking musical genius whose inimitable voice and timeless songs have been treasured since his first solo album forty-five years ago," said **Alicia Graf Mack**, the Daria L. and Eric J. Wallach Artistic Director of AILEY. "It is also a joy to have SZA serving as an Honorary Chair, whose own trailblazing artistry has been celebrated for redefining modern R&B, as well as Spike Lee and Tonya Lee, who are celebrated for innovatively shaping modern American cinema with their thought-provoking and socially impactful storytelling."

The highly anticipated ***Power of Love*** is choreographed by **Jamar Roberts** and created in collaboration with Primary Wave Music and The Luther Vandross Estate. The tribute to a legendary vocalist and multi-dimensional musical artist brings Vandross' romantic, funky, and eminently danceable music exuberantly to life with Roberts' intuitive, emotionally resonant movement, complemented by striking costumes designed by **Andre Landeros Michel of LANDEROS NEW YORK.** Fittingly, the debut performance will be introduced by **Honorary Chair SZA,** one of the most critically acclaimed and commercially successful artists of her generation. At the 2026 Grammy Awards, she and Kendrick Lamar were awarded the prestigious **Record of the Year** for their collaborative track, "luther."

SZA said, "My mother and I go to Alvin Ailey every year for Mother's Day. *Revelations* has informed both of our lives greatly. I love Luther and I'm honored to be a part of something so integral to our history, Black expression and creativity."

Prior to the world premiere, **Honorary Chairs Spike Lee & Tonya Lee** will introduce a *Power of Love* film inviting the audience to journey behind-the-scenes during the making of this unprecedented ballet through the lens of filmmaker **Nelson George**. Viewers will step into the recording studio with Luther Vandross' longtime collaborator Marcus Miller and into the rehearsal room with brilliant choreographer Jamar Roberts as the two conceive the music and movement, along with a cast of musicians and dancers, for a unique creation using the late singer/songwriter's music as a guiding force.

Honorary Chair Spike Lee is an Academy Award-winning director, producer, and screenwriter celebrated for his pioneering, socially conscious films that profoundly shaped modern American cinema. Honorary Chair Tonya Lee is an award-winning filmmaker, author, and women's health advocate dedicated to social impact storytelling.

Presented just weeks after he is inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the celebration of Vandross' life and music features many of his biggest hits including "Never Too Much," "Here and Now," "Dance With My Father," "A House Is Not A Home" and of course, his classic and the shows namesake – "Power Of Love." The soundtrack of award-winning fan favorites will resonate with arrangements by Vandross' longtime collaborators Marcus Miller and Ron Gillyard who, along with Reginald Hudlin, are partners in developing this incomparable dance and music tribute.

"Luther and Ailey are a match made in heaven," said **Marcus Miller**. "Ron and I dove in, and with the help of our dear friend, film director Reginald Hudlin, we took on the task of making this project come to life in a way Luther would be proud of." He continues, "We chose which songs to include which reflected the breadth of Luther's career and could also translate well to dance. We made slightly new arrangements of a few songs and added some small touches to tickle the ear with some musical surprises."

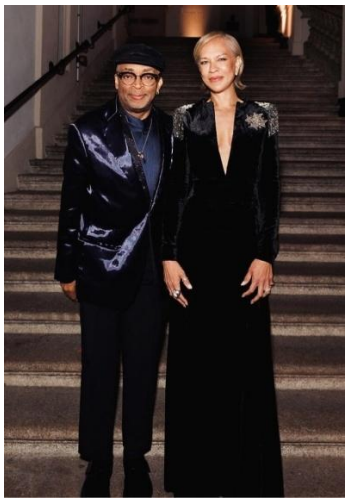
The evening also features an excerpt of ***Hymn***, Artistic Director Emerita **Judith Jamison's** Emmy Award–winning iconic tribute to Alvin Ailey, which has returned to the repertory after nearly 15 years. A unique collaboration between two highly acclaimed talents from the worlds of dance and theater, *Hymn* features personal recollections from Ms. Jamison and dancers arranged by the multi-talented actor and playwright Anna Deavere Smith, along with a percussive score by Robert Ruggieri, to create a landmark work that's as intimately moving as it is awe-inspiring. Following the performance, prominent figures in the worlds of entertainment, business, and philanthropy will join in the festive dinner-dance party at the Ziegfeld Ballroom.

Also, AILEY is pleased to announce the **2026 Opening Night Gala Honorary Committee includes Debbie Allen, Council Member Gale A. Brewer, Cynthia Erivo, Jennifer Garner, Nelson George, Ron Gillyard, Tamron Hall, H.E.R., Manhattan Borough President Brad Hoylman-Sigal, Reginald Hudlin, Samara Joy, Gayle King, Lizzo, LL Cool J, Audra McDonald, Marcus Miller, Karen Pittman, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Anna Deavere Smith, and Vanessa Williams. The event's co-chairs are Jody & John Arnhold, Emily & Len Blavatnik, Jack Pitts, Paula A. & Michael D. Price, Daria L. & Eric J. Wallach, Joan & Sandy Weill, and Pamela D. Zilly & John H. Schaefer; vice chairs are Anthony S. Kendall and Tara L. Smith.** Proceeds from the gala support the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, including the creation of new works, scholarships for talented students at The Ailey School, and AILEY's innovative outreach programs for all ages. Call 212-405-9029 or visit ailey.org/events/opening-night-gala-2026 for gala tickets.

Performance only tickets for opening night and the company's five-week engagement at City Center are on sale now at the New York City Center Box Office, through Customer Care at 212-581-1212, or online at Ailey.org/CityCenter or nycitycenter.org/ailey. The company will move audiences with world premieres by Jamar Roberts and Yue Yin, a company premiere by William Forsythe, new productions of Judith Jamison's *Hymn* and Alvin Ailey's *Pas de Duke*, as well as a variety of repertory favorites, including Alvin Ailey's American masterpiece *Revelations*. Due to popular demand, three additional performances of Jamar Roberts' *Power of Love* are now scheduled on **Dec 20 (eve), Dec 27 (eve), and Jan 2 (eve)**. **Tickets start at $45 (fees included) and are on sale** at the New York City Center box office, through Customer Care at 212-581-1212, or at **ailey.org** or **nycitycenter.org**.

Prior to inspiring audiences at New York City Center, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will complete an **International Tour** reaching stages in London, Zürich, Brussels, Paris, and Madrid during September and October. From January through May 2027, performances will visit over 20 cities from coast-to-coast during a North American tour.

PRESS: For photos, videos, and materials, visit **pressroom.alvinailey.org**. **Press interested in covering this event can request media credentials by completing the form here**.



(L to R): Honorary Chair SZA. Photo by Cassidy Meyers. Choreographer Jamar Roberts. Photo by Andrew Eccles. Spike Lee and Tonya Lee. Photo by German Larkin for Giorgio Armani.
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Bank of America is Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Global Tour Sponsor.

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AILEY's New York City Center Season is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

The original creation of *Hymn* was made possible, in part, with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency, and by grants from The Rockefeller Foundation and Diego Della Valle.
Leadership support for this new production of *Hymn* is provided by The Pamela D. Zilly & John H. Schaefer New Works Endowment Fund.
Generous support for this new production of *Hymn* was provided by Kathleen & Ernest Abrahamson, Judith McDonough Kaminski & Joseph Kaminski, Alma Scott, Daria L. & Eric J. Wallach, and The Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey—Sara and Bill Morgan New Works Endowment Fund.

***Power of Love* is a newly commissioned ballet in collaboration with Primary Wave Music and the Luther Vandross Estate.**
The creation of *Power of Love* is supported by commissioning funds from New York City Center.
The world premiere of Power of Love is made possible with major support from Debra L. Lee and AARP.
Generous support for *Power of Love* is provided by Michele & Timothy Barakett, Maury & Joseph Bohan, Julie C. Down, Nancy & Michael Feller, Ann & Weston Hicks, Crawford Parker, M.D., Tracy Elise Poole, Paula & Michael Price, and Vera F. Wells.

ABOUT ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, recognized by US Congressional resolution as a vital American "Cultural Ambassador to the World," grew from a now-fabled March 1958 performance in New York that changed forever the perception of American dance. Forged during a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement, the company was established to uplift the African American experience while transcending boundaries of race, faith, and nationality with its universal humanity. Before his untimely death in 1989, Mr. Ailey named Judith Jamison as his successor, and for 21 years she brought the company to unprecedented success. Alicia Graf Mack, widely celebrated for her dance artistry during her years with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, was appointed Artistic Director of AILEY as of July 1, 2025. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has performed for an estimated 25 million people in 71 countries on six continents, promoting the uniqueness of the African American cultural experience and the preservation and enrichment of the American modern dance tradition. In addition to being the Principal Dance Company of New York City Center, where its performances have become a year-end holiday tradition, the Ailey company performs annually at the Auditorium Theatre in Chicago, The Fox Theatre in Atlanta, Zellerbach Hall in Berkeley, CA, and at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark (where it is the Principal Resident Affiliate), and appears frequently in other major theaters throughout the world during extensive tours. AILEY also includes Ailey II (1974), a second performing company of emerging young dancers and innovative choreographers; The Ailey School (1969), one of the most extensive dance training programs in the world; Ailey Arts In Education & Community Programs (1992), which brings dance into the classrooms, communities, and lives of people of all ages; and Ailey Extension (2005), a program offering dance and fitness classes to the general public, which began with the opening of Ailey's permanent home— the largest building dedicated to dance in New York City, the dance capital of the world—named The Joan Weill Center for Dance, at 55th Street at 9th Avenue in New York City. For more information, visit ailey.org.

ABOUT LUTHER VANDROSS

For nearly 25 years, from 1981 to 2005, Vandross dominated the American R&B music charts like no other artist before or since. He released eight #1 R&B albums, seven #1 R&B singles, and another five Top 20 R&B singles. He achieved crossover success with eight Billboard Top 10 albums, including "Dance With My Father," which reached #1in 2003, and five Top 10 Billboard Hot 100 singles. He saw 13 albums go platinum and has received an astounding 31 Grammy nominations, winning 8 times. On November 14, 2026, Luther will be officially inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame after being honored in his very first year of eligibility, cementing his legacy as one of the most defining vocalists in music history. This is yet another honor recognizing Luther's multi-dimensional talents as a singer, performer, songwriter and producer. In the years since his passing, one constant has remained to define his life and musical success: his voice.

ABOUT SZA

SZA is a seven-time Grammy Award-winning singer and songwriter who has achieved global prominence for her introspective, genre-defying style. With more than 70 billion streams, SZA has consistently shattered records. Her major label debut, *Ctrl*, made history as the first album by a female artist to remain on the Billboard 200 for over 460 weeks. SZA followed this with the 8x Platinum *SOS* and its expanded edition, *SOS Deluxe: LANA.* Both debuted and spent thirteen weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 and 100 weeks in the Top 10, surpassing Michael Jackson's *Thriller* for the longest stay by a Black artist in the chart's history. With over 70 career wins, SZA's accolades include Grammy Awards for Record of the Year ("luther" with Kendrick Lamar), Best R&B Song ("Snooze" and "Saturn"), and Best Progressive R&B Album (*SOS*). She has also received Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations for "All The Stars." Her 2025 co-headlining *Grand National Tour* with Kendrick Lamar stands as the most successful duo tour ever. Beyond music, she has starred in the No. 1 comedy *One of Them Days*, launched her makeup line NOT Beauty, and serves as Vans' Artistic Director. SZA continues to exemplify fearless creativity and record-shattering achievement.

ABOUT SPIKE LEE

Academy Award winner Spike Lee's iconic body of storytelling has made an indelible mark on filmmaking and television. His career spans over 30 years, including *She's Gotta Have It*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Mo' Better Blues*, *Malcolm X*, *Crooklyn*, *Summer of Sam*, *Bamboozled*, *25th Hour*, *Inside Man*, *Da 5 Bloods*, *BlacKkKlansman* and *Highest 2 Lowest*. Lee's outstanding feature documentary work includes the double Emmy Award-winning *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, and the Peabody Award-winning *A Huey P Newton Story*. In the television arena, his Netflix original series, *She's Gotta Have It*, a contemporary update of his classic film, ran two seasons. Lee is a five-time Oscar nominee (*Do the Right Thing* for Original Screenplay, *4 Little Girls* for Documentary Feature, *BlacKkKlansman* for Best Picture, Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay, for which Lee won the award). He was awarded an Honorary Oscar in 2015, for his lifetime achievement and contributions to the state of motion picture arts and sciences, and in 2023 the National Medal of Arts. He is a graduate of Morehouse College and New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where he is a tenured professor of film and artistic director. Lee's Production Company 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks is based in Da Republic of Brooklyn, New York.

ABOUT TONYA LEE

Tonya Lewis Lee is an American producer, director, author, entrepreneur, and former attorney known for her socially impactful storytelling. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and the University of Virginia School of Law, she has worked as a children's television producer with Disney, Nickelodeon, and Noggin/The N, where she was the executive producer of the award-winning documentary *I Sit Where I Want: The Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education* and the critically acclaimed miniseries *Miracle's Boys.* Lewis Lee is an accomplished author, having co-written three children's books with her husband, Spike Lee: *Please Baby Please* (2002), *Please Puppy Please* (2004), and *Giant Steps to Change the World* (2011). She is also the co-author of the best-selling novel Gotham Diaries.

ABOUT NELSON GEORGE

Nelson George is multi-talented writer and filmmaker who specializes in documenting and celebrating African-American culture. His nonfiction books include the award winning Where Did Our Love Go: The Rise and Fall of the Motown Sound, The Death of Rhythm & Blues and the forth coming Brooklyn Bohemians, being published by Henry Holt in March 2027. His documentary films include Say Hey Willie Mays, Thriller 40 and A Ballerina's Tale about dancer Misty Copeland.

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