



Christopher Taylor brings Ailey home to Newark at the end

The New Jersey native went from watching Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from the audience at NJPAC as a child to performing on that same stage. Now he brings the national tour home one more time

By: Sophie Lloyd
April 1, 2026



Christopher Taylor did not discover dance in a studio. He found it after school in a middle school gymnasium in Newark, N.J., when the Ailey education program came to his campus and showed him something he had never seen before. Black people moving in ways that stopped him cold. He was 11 years old, and his entire understanding of what dance could be shifted in an instant.

More than a decade later, Taylor is a dancer with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, wrapping up the company's national tour at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), the very stage where he once sat in the

audience dreaming. Rolling out's Arts in Studio sat down with him to talk about the journey, the homecoming and what it means to carry a legacy.

The national tour is wrapping up. How has the season been?

It has been exciting because of the company's new director, Alicia Graf Mack. There is a lot of new energy in the air and you can feel the transition happening. We are focused and diligent. We performed at City Center in December and have been on tour from January through May. I am really happy about the future and what she can bring to us. She is a fearless leader and we are supporting her fully.

What do you feel when you dance?

I feel spiritually connected, especially being at Alvin Ailey, a predominantly Black company that I grew up watching since I was a child. When I am dancing here I feel it was destiny. I feel I am here for a reason. It feels almost out of body, like I am not lost but beyond myself. What I can do with my body still feels unreal to me.

Which piece felt the most personal to you on this tour and why?

A piece called *Embrace* by Frederick Earl Mosley. He is a mentor of mine. I met him when I was very young and he taught many of us through the modern dance community in New York while I was commuting from Newark to train. For him to put a piece on the company now feels like a full-circle moment. He gave me so many tools growing up. His work is part of my roots and my upbringing as a dancer.

Every year the tour ends at NJPAC. What can people expect?

NJPAC is already a tradition for me. I used to be in the audience there, and finishing the tour at NJPAC for the past four years has been an honor. You are going to experience passion, hard work and technique. Everything we have been fine-tuning across this entire season, you will see it all on stage in Newark. As a dancer you have to do a tremendous amount of work with your spirit, your mind and your body. Newark will see us at our strongest. The final shows run from May 8th through the 10th.

You saw Ailey perform on that same stage before you ever joined the company. What do you remember?

I came to performances at NJPAC from around age 12 to 15. I remember seeing *Grace* there and being completely amazed by the house music and the Afro-influenced style it carried, a combination I had never seen used that way before. It had a clear storyline about spirituality, realism, persevering through life and humanity. We are actually performing *Grace* at NJPAC again this year for the morning school shows. I used to take those same trips with my middle and high school. Now, I am dancing *Grace* for children the same age I was when I first saw it. That is what full circle actually feels like.

Would you say dance is deeply connected to the spiritual for you?

It always comes down to intention. My intention is to connect with something beyond and something within, which I believe is the spirit. I was given the gift of dance and I do not know exactly where that came from, but I feel it. At Ailey, we use the word "spirit" often. I was trained to dance from my spirit, to dance for my soul, because that is where I can begin to tell my story organically. The pieces easiest for me to perform are the ones that involve love, struggle, hope and inspiration. Dance comes from the people and should be given back to the people. Having that dialogue with your heart is what matters most.

What does it feel like to perform on that stage knowing where you started?

I love my city. Newark is a proud Black city with so many different art forms living inside it. My city made me the artist I am. My grandmother raised me. She was a single parent who surrounded me with art, music and this idea of fighting for what you want. Newark is a house music city. My grandmother had me around DJs at festivals and people were dancing in the streets. That music is in my spine, in my hips, in my body. I can trace the way I move back to what Newark gave me. I am very blessed and very thankful.

What made you fall in love with dance at 11 years old?

The Ailey education program came to my middle school after school and taught us Horton technique and ballet, showing us videos of Alvin Ailey and his Blood Memories. That was when I understood that dance was not just hip-hop and ballerinas. It was far more complex. When I saw Black people dancing that way I was in awe, and I knew I wanted to do that. My brain flipped a switch.

I went to AileyCamp the next few summers and started commuting from Newark to take classes in New York from age 11 through 18. After graduating from Arts High School I received a scholarship to the Ailey School's Professional Division and trained Monday through Friday from morning into the evening. I just really wanted to be there, so I worked my way up step by step.

What does it mean to carry Ailey's legacy every time you step on stage?

I am proud to be Black and proud of my history and my legacy. One of the main reasons I am here is because I saw Black people dance in a way that inspired me. I do not take that for granted because I am now inspiring the next generation. Examples are needed. I remember being a child and having my perspective changed by someone who looked like me, someone I could relate to, someone who looked like my auntie, my mother, my grandmother. That matters more than I can put into words.

What is the one thing you want young Black dancers to hear?

Love yourself. Love being Black and be proud of it. We have so much culture and history. My elders told me it was okay to celebrate, to move, to battle each other to house music in the street. That is Black to me and it is beautiful. I am grateful for it because it made me who I am. It comes with a responsibility because I have been given these tools and I am seeing these messages play out in real time. Do not take it for granted.

What is next for you after the tour, and where can people find you?

After the tour I go back to Arts High School in Newark to work with the students there. I put a piece on them before I leave for tour and come back to refine it with them. I also teach in New York where I live now. A lot of rest is needed but I stay moving. I am 26 and I am having fun giving back and working with other artists. For tickets and information visit alvinailey.org. I will be at NJPAC from May 8th through the 10th performing *Blink of an Eye* by Medhi Walerski, *Embrace* by Fredrick Earl Mosley and *Revelations* by Alvin Ailey himself. Please come out, show your support and let us show what Newark is about.