



Sebastian Garcia returns home in breakout season with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

By: Brenda Hillegas

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Sebastian Garcia is celebrating his first season as a member of the world-renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. When the company returns to Philadelphia this weekend, audiences will see Garcia stepping onto a stage that feels like familiar ground.

The Bronx native — who once trained at Philadelphia's Rock School for Dance Education under the direction of Bo and Stephanie Spasoff — began his formal training at the Harlem School of the Arts and continued at the ABT Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School.

His dedication to the craft also led to him receiving the En Avant Award, which allowed him to work with choreographers including Jessica Lang and Alexei Ratmansky. Previously, Garcia has danced for the Black Iris Project and has worked on Broadway projects with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and at Carnegie Hall.

Now, as he takes on two key roles in 'Revelations,' as well as world premieres of new works 'Difference Between' and 'Jazz Island,' Garcia's return to Philadelphia marks a new chapter — and a bold new era under Artistic Director Alicia Graf Mack — with the influential dance company.

Ahead of the company's Philadelphia engagement, Garcia talks about his path to dancing with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, stepping into iconic works like 'Revelations,' and what excites him about the company's future.



Tell us about the moment you realized dance was something you wanted to pursue seriously.

As a kid, I always enjoyed dancing. During family gatherings, I danced every chance I could. The defining moment I chose to pursue dance professionally was when I saw Alvin Ailey perform at City Center during Robert Battle's first season with the company. I remember seeing the dancers move so powerfully and proficiently, both in their technical abilities and emotional vulnerability. I didn't know how, but I wanted to do the same thing someday.

How did your time at The Rock School in Philadelphia shape the technique and artistry you bring to the stage as an Alvin Ailey dancer?

Dancing at the Rock School, I was very fortunate to have had teachers who instilled in me the importance of repetition and hard work. Many of my teachers taught dance in vastly different ways. This gave me a sense of confidence when I left the school because I was already comfortable with using my brain in different ways to move. Repetition was also something enforced a lot, which allowed me to enjoy fine-tuning my technical abilities. Working as an artist with Alvin Ailey, our repertoire is vastly different and performing multiple shows often requires me to find new ways to rehearse myself to maintain the integrity of the piece emotionally and physically.

'Revelations' has been a beloved and powerful work of modern dance for more than six decades. What do you think gives it such extraordinary emotional impact?

Created in 1960 by Alvin Ailey, 'Revelations' depicts themes of loss, despair, forgiveness, and hope told by music from negro religious spirituals. The entire piece is still emotionally impactful to viewers who see it because it is relatable. Everyone has experienced something presented on stage at least once in their life.



Do you have a favorite onstage moment that still gives you chills every time you see it?

While I've had many moments on stage that have given me chills, one specific moment is during New York City Center season launch when the company was performing another ballet from Mr. Ailey called 'Memoria.' In the ballet, the lead woman completes a challenging solo to very intense music. Every time I've seen it danced by the leading women of the company, they interpret the movement so differently. I can literally see the colors of the music portrayed through their dancing. Every time I see this moment in the ballet I'm always impressed.

Looking at the future of the company, are there any parts of the journey ahead that feel most inspiring to you? I would definitely say I'm interested in seeing how the company will continue to evolve in this growing age. The arts are such an important asset to human connection and I'm excited to see what the company can offer now that more viewers are getting exposed to dance.

How do you see Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's mission resonating with audiences today?

Mr. Ailey believed "dance came from the people and should always be delivered back to the people." As we're entering the next chapter of the world and of "AILEY" led by Artistic Director Alicia Graf Mack, another generation is being introduced to the company with fresh perspectives on life. This gives the chance for new works to be created by the company; works that inspire and allow additional audiences to see themselves on stage.

Is there anything you're looking forward to doing while you're back in Philadelphia this week?

I'm definitely looking forward to catching up with old friends and ultimately seeing what has changed after all these years. Philadelphia is a very changing city so it would be nice to see what's new.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will be on stage at the Academy of Music from Feb. 27 to March 1. For more information and tickets, visit ensembleartsphilly.org



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