

SURFACE

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Debuts Rockefeller Center's First-Ever Dance Film

Creative director Samuel Schler translates the company's archives into an electric piece across the New York City landmark

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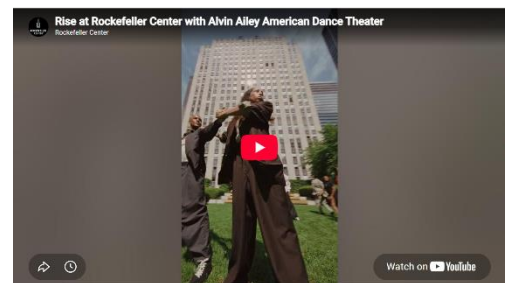
September 18, 2026



In 1931, construction began on Rockefeller Center in Midtown Manhattan—the beginning of a city within the city. That year, groundbreaking dancer and choreographer Alvin Ailey was born in Rogers, Texas. With “Rise,” the first-ever dance film anchored in the New York City landmark, the work of Alvin Ailey soars across Rockefeller Center, from its storied observation level to the gilded sculpture of Prometheus and even the elevated gardens of Radio Park. In the short, seven dancers, styled in looks from New York designers like LUAR and Collina Strada, translate signature Ailey choreography to “Baddy on the Floor,” a

rousing sonic collaboration between Jamie xx and Honey Dijon.

The project's creative director, Samuel Schler, sees a shared gravitational force between the location and the dance company, both timeless and of their times. “This film is an exercise of recontextualization: what happens when you take a historical dance repertory, transpose it outside of a theater stage and into the very heart of New York City, and add a layer of dance club music?” He tells Surface. “How do you maintain the essence of legacy while taking it into the present? This is an exercise I find fascinating.”



Central to this is the time Schler spent with Matthew Rushing, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Associate Artistic Director, in the company's archives. “We worked closely on identifying repertory fragments that made sense to reference for this film and transformed them to create the site-specific piece for Rockefeller Center,” he explains of what they pulled from decades of choreography. His intention: “for audiences to watch the film and feel an overall sense of joy, an urge to move their bodies, and a sense of awe at the beauty of the architecture of New York City.”

Schler established the visual narrative and sense of momentum with director Philipp Paulus and cinematographer Jake Moore. “Rockefeller Center is a lead character of the film alongside the seven dancers, and there is a sort of dance that happens between movement and space throughout the film,” he explains. “We tend to think of architecture as set in stone, but when you

look at a landmark like Rockefeller Center, which has evolved over almost a hundred years, motion is actually at the core of what is happening. It is interesting to juxtapose actual motion with historical and cultural motion.”

“Rise” follows Schler's Brooklyn Museum-set dance film “Transient,” which premiered last year to much acclaim, as well as his work this year on Rockefeller Center's United Flags of Fashion exhibition, for which 100 designers reinterpreted the nation's flags. “I see the role of a creative director as both a vision conductor and a cultural listener,” he concludes.

“Rockefeller Center has served as a canvas for hundreds of artists for nearly a century, and is proud to become a center stage for Alvin Ailey's newest piece,” EB Kelly, Senior Managing Director at Tishman Speyer and Head of Rockefeller Center, adds. In fact, the film is only the first piece in the collaboration. To celebrate National Dance Day, Alvin Ailey teaching artists will host free public workshops on September 19 and 26, and October 3.

