



"I am proud that France and French Guiana are represented through me": Yannick Lebrun, Alvin Ailey's French star

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A meeting with Yannick Lebrun, a French dancer with the American Alvin Ailey company.

We first met him in 2017. With a sculptural physique, bare chest, and coffee-colored skin splashed with paint, Yannick Lebrun looked like a work of art. Photographed mid-leap in this manner, the Frenchman became the face of the Alvin Ailey

American Dance Theater on all its posters. Today, the artist hasn't aged a day. His aesthetic appeal, talent, and physique remain dedicated to the troupe founded by the famous Black American choreographer. At 39, Yannick has become an indispensable member—one of the most experienced bearers of the company's legacy. "I've gained maturity," he explains, "and self-confidence. Perfection doesn't exist, but by learning to let go, I've adopted a freer approach to movement that allows me to convey more emotion."

"I fell in love with New York"

A native of Cayenne, raised amidst the rhythms of Carnival, he began his training at the Adaclam (Association for Classical and Modern-Jazz Dance). During a competition in Martinique, Denise Jefferson—director of the Alvin Ailey dance school—took notice of him. He was 14 years old. Through a series of workshops, she opened the door to the company for him. He was just 17 when he moved to New York. "I fell in love with the city, its energy, the company, and the rigor and focus required for a life as a dancer." Above all, he felt that his path lay here. Alvin Ailey's artistic vision resonated deeply with his own personal history.



In 1958, Ailey—a young dancer of 27—founded his company because the climate of the era offered few opportunities for African Americans. Drawing inspiration from gospel, Caribbean dance, jazz, and contemporary styles, he sought to address the painful history of Black people in the United States. "My Creole culture helps me understand the themes Alvin Ailey explored," says the dancer from French Guiana. "It is part of my soul. They resonate with the suffering experienced in the overseas territories. This socially conscious dance—which is part of the company's DNA—remains deeply relevant in 2026." Yannick also felt the urge to express himself creatively; he occasionally choreographs works, including solos—one of which was performed at the American Ballet Theatre—and sequences for Disney films.

A dancer with Alvin Ailey for nearly 20 years, the Frenchman serves as both a guardian of the company's repertoire and a transmitter of knowledge, ensuring the legacy lives on from one body to the next. "By tradition, senior dancers pass on the ballets, techniques, and company culture to the younger ones," he explains. "I am proud of this responsibility. I am also proud to represent both France and French Guiana."

Through his own story, Yannick wants to show that it is possible to succeed even when coming from a challenging background. "My journey proves that you can find your place in the world despite the obstacles. I would like to inspire younger generations," he acknowledges. Every year, when he visits his family in French Guiana, he takes the opportunity to organize workshops at his former school. He occasionally teaches classes in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and sometimes Paris.

"I've even given masterclasses to the dancers from **The Lion King** (the musical)," he adds. Like Denise Jefferson before him, he brings some students to New York for summer workshops. It is a way of giving back to life what it gave him: the freedom to dance!



