

ALVIN AILEY JR.

b. January 5, 1931

d. December 1, 1989

"I am trying to show the world that we are all human beings and that color is not important. What is important is the quality of our work."

A prolific choreographer, Alvin Ailey created 79 original works for his company. His signature piece, "Revelations" (1960), is touted as the most-watched work of modern dance.

Alvin Ailey Jr. was an internationally acclaimed dancer and choreographer. He founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, a dance company hailed as an ambassador of American culture. Ailey formed a multiracial company and revolutionized dance, incorporating elements of ballet and jazz, along with modern and African dance, into his work.

Ailey grew up in Rogers, Texas, the son of a young, struggling single mother. His father abandoned the family when Ailey was six months old. In 1941, the family moved to Los Angeles, where Ailey met Lester Horton, who ran the first multiracial dance school.

Horton took Ailey under his wing, teaching him a variety of dance styles and techniques. In 1953, Ailey joined Horton's company. Later that year, he was named artistic director.

In 1954, Ailey made his Broadway debut dancing in "House of Flowers." He also performed in "Sing, Man, Sing" with Harry Belafonte and in "Jamaica" with Lena Horne.

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In 1957, Ailey established the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The company's premiere performance, "Blues Suite"—a riveting work reflecting the African-American emotional experience—defined Ailey's theatrical and eclectic style.

A prolific choreographer, Ailey created 79 original works for his company. "Revelations" (1960), recognized as his signature piece, is touted as the most-watched work of modern dance. "Cry" (1971), one of Ailey's most successful works, was dedicated to his mother and African-American women.

In 1979, Ailey received the Springarn Medal for outstanding achievement from the NAACP. In 1988, he was recognized with a Kennedy Center Honors Award.

Ailey died at age 58 from complications of AIDS. In his memory, a section of West 61st Street in New York was named "Alvin Ailey Way."

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