

# AILEY II

**Francesca Harper, Artistic Director**

Sylvia Waters, Artistic Director Emerita

Alvin Ailey, Founder

## **Company Members**

Kamani Abu, Jada Ammons, Carley Cruzat Brooks, Meredith Brown,  
Christian Butts, Jennifer M. Gerken, Xavier Logan, Xhosa Scott,  
Adanna Smalls, Darion Turner, Eric J. Vidaña, Jordyn White

Shay Bland, Rehearsal Director

## **Apprentices**

Vic E. Davis, Jaydin J. De Jesús, Naia Neal, Michelle Osanya

**Alicia Graf Mack, Artistic Director of AILEY**

**Bennett Rink, Executive Director of AILEY**

Ailey II gratefully acknowledges the generous support provided by  
The Glorja Kaufman Dance Foundation.

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment  
of any kind during performances is strictly prohibited.

Programming and casting subject to change.

## **Company Story**

### **Ailey II—The Next Generation of Dance—is AILEY’s second company.**

Founded in 1974 as the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, Ailey II has advanced Alvin Ailey’s vision by giving early-career dancers the vital experience of transitioning from training as a student to becoming a professional dancer. Ailey II dancers bring their technical mastery and emotional depth to works by the most daring established and emerging choreographers. Just as Mr. Ailey envisioned, the company continues to expand the audience for dance through global touring and community-based performances.

Sylvia Waters, the company’s first artistic director, was personally chosen by Mr. Ailey and led the company for 38 seasons. In September 2021, Francesca Harper became artistic director. Ms. Harper—a former student at The Ailey School who has choreographed for both AILEY companies—guides Ailey II with her unique perspective, paying homage to Mr. Ailey’s legacy while taking the company in bold, new directions.

Under Ms. Harper’s direction, Ailey II is forging a new path for modern dance—one that’s inclusive, experimental, and transformative.

## **BERRY DREAMIN'**

(2025)

Choreography by Chalvar Monteiro

Music by Chuck Berry\*

Costume design by Danté Baylor

Lighting design by Brandon Stirling Baker

Kamani Abu, Jada Ammons, Meredith Brown,  
Jennifer M. Gerken, Xavier Logan, Jordyn White

Chalvar Monteiro hails from Montclair, NJ and received his BFA from the Conservatory of Dance at SUNY Purchase. Monteiro has worked with Sidra Bell Dance New York, Elisa Monte Dance, Keigwin+Company, A.I.M by Kyle Abraham, BODYTRAFFIC, GALLIM, Ailey II and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. In 2019, Monteiro performed in Merce Cunningham Trust's *Night of 100 Solos: A Centennial Event*, and later joined the faculty at Tisch School of the Arts at NYU in 2020. His choreography has been presented at the Fire Island Dance Festival, Lincoln Center, Fordham University, the Conservatory of Dance at SUNY Purchase, and worked alongside Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Samantha Figgins on *'The Holy Blues'* for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

The creation of *Berry Dreamin'* is supported, in part, by commissioning funds from Dance St. Louis.

The creation of *Berry Dreamin'* is supported by Kim van Doorn.

\* "Oh Louisiana," Drifting Heart," "Johnny B. Goode (Endel Sleep Soundscape / Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, Part4)," "No Money Down," "Maybellene," "Memphis , Tennessee," "Downbound Train," "Havana Moon," and "Together (We'll Always Be)" performed and written by Chuck Berry, courtesy of Dualtone Music Group.

*-INTERMISSION-*

## **THIRD PERSON POINT OF VIEW**

(2025)

Choreography by My'Kal Stromile

Music by Various Artists\*

Costume design by Ezra Lovesky

Lighting design by Brandon Stirling Baker

Kamani Abu, Jennifer M. Gerken, Darion Turner

My'Kal Stromile received his BFA from The Juilliard School under the direction of Larry Rhodes, following training with Kim Abel, Ceyhun Ozsoy, Dereque Whiturs, and Anna-Marie Holmes at The School at Jacob's Pillow. A 2014 U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts, an honor awarded by President Barack Obama, he has performed works by William Forsythe, Aszure Barton, Crystal Pite, Dwight Rhoden, and Jerome Robbins, and danced with Bruce Wood Dance, Disney Productions, and Boston Ballet (2018–2024), where he became a Princess Grace Award nominee. Stromile has choreographed for Boston Ballet, The Juilliard School, the Joyce Theater's UNITE Ballet Festival, and Vail Dance Festival, among others. In 2024, he choreographed Word for Word for the Paris Opera Ballet in collaboration with CHANEL and participated in the New York Choreographic Institute. He is the recipient of Juilliard's Hector Zaraspe Prize in Choreography and was recognized with Choreographic Honors three consecutive years. Upcoming commissions include Juilliard's New Dances and Boston Ballet (2026).

\* "Magnets" (feat. Alan Thompson, 5hekwoaga, & Butler Knowles) by Elijah Fox courtesy of Universal Music Group.

"Nothing Can Stop Us" performed by The Vernon Spring, written by Sam Beste.

"Strength Of A Young Man" performed by The Vernon Spring, written by Sam Beste courtesy of BMG Rights Management.

"Cashew" performed by FKJ, written by Vincent Fenton.

"Meeting Again in the Void" performed by FKJ, written by Vincent Fenton.

"TUI" performed and written FKJ.

"Lying Together- Interlude" performed by FKJ, written by Vincent Fenton.

*-INTERMISSION-*

## **DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE**

(2024)

Choreography by Houston Thomas

Music by Johannes Goldbach and Pomassl\*

Costume design by Jasmine Schulter and Houston Thomas

Lighting design by Aja M. Jackson

Jennifer M. Gerken, Xavier Logan, Carley Cruzat Brooks, Xhosa Scott

Jordyn White, Christian Butts

Houston Thomas has choreographed works for schools and companies, including The Washington Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, The Juilliard School, American Ballet Theater Studio Company, Joffrey Ballet Academy of Dance, and The School of American Ballet. In 2022, he premiered his work *Follow the White Rabbit* at the Young Emergent Choreographers Contest in Biarritz, France, receiving a commission to create *SKYWATCHER* for the Opera National de Bordeaux. As a dancer, Thomas performed as a second soloist with the Dresden Semperoper Ballett, and he has been featured in pivotal roles in acclaimed works by George Balanchine, Sir Frederick Ashton, William Forsythe, and David Dawson, among others.

The creation of *Down the Rabbit Hole* is supported by Robert A. Press, M.D.

\* "Nitro," "Blank Jack," and "Terawatt Hours" by Pomassl, courtesy of raster-media.

**FRANCESCA HARPER, Artistic Director**

Francesca Harper began her professional dance career with Dance Theatre of Harlem. She was also a member of Ballett Frankfurt from 1991-1999 under the direction of William Forsythe, and she has performed on Broadway in productions including *Fosse*, *All Shook Up*, *The Color Purple*, *Sweet Charity*, and *Sophisticated Ladies*, and was nominated for Best Actress in a Musical by Broadway.com for her role as Billie Holiday in *Lady Day* at Emerson's Bar and Grill. Ms. Harper created her first play, *50 minutes with Harriet and Phillis*, produced by Anna Deavere Smith, with her aunt, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Margo Jefferson, and Paul Miller, a.k.a DJ Spooky. In 2014, she debuted her critically acclaimed one-woman show, *The Look of Feeling*, as a writer, actor, dancer, and vocalist. She is also the writer, producer, composer, and narrator of the documentary film *To Lillian* (2021). Ms. Harper has choreographed works for companies including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, Dance Theater of Harlem, Hubbard Street II, and Tanz Graz, as well as The Francesca Harper Project, which she had founded in 2005. Her television and film credits include appearances on *Boardwalk Empire*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. She served as ballet consultant for the motion picture *Black Swan* and was featured in *Zinnias – The Life of Clementine Hunter*, directed by Robert Wilson. In 2013, Ms. Harper received a Living History Award during Black History Month from Long Island University and the Innovation and Technology Award for her choreography for Fashion Week with designer Louis Vuitton. She also served as co-director and choreographer for the musical *Rose's War* and as movement director for Tommy Hilfiger and Zendaya for their fashion show at the Apollo Theater in 2019. Ms. Harper was the creator and directorial consultant for 16 world premiere virtual films. Her latest works include a new creation for Wendy Whelan, Associate Artistic Director of New York City Ballet, and poet Marc Bamuthi Joseph. Currently, Ms. Harper is engaged as Executive Producer with Sony Pictures on a series in development, and recently she received her Masters of Fine Arts degree from Goddard College.

**SYLVIA WATERS, Artistic Director Emerita, Ailey II**

Sylvia Waters was personally selected by Alvin Ailey in 1974 as Artistic Director of Ailey II and led the company for 38 years. She attended The Juilliard School, where she worked with Donald McKayle's company, and with a young Hava Kohav—who later became an actress and Academy Award nominee—performing very often to widely populated audiences of the entire New York Dance community at the YMHA. After receiving her B.S. from Juilliard, she moved to Paris, where she appeared regularly on television. She toured in the European company of *Black Nativity* and worked with Michel Descombey, then director of the Paris Opera Ballet, as well as Milko Šparembleck. She also performed in Donald McKayle's European production of *Black New World* and worked with Maurice Béjart's company performing in Brussels and at the Summer Olympics in Mexico City. In 1968, Ms. Waters joined Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and toured with the Company until assuming leadership of Ailey II. She has received honorary doctorates from the State University of New York at Oswego and The Juilliard School, and she has served as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. Ms. Waters is a recipient of the Legacy Award as part of the 20th Annual IABD Festival, Syracuse University's Women of Distinction Award, a *Dance Magazine* Award, and a "Bessie" Award.

**SHAY BLAND, Rehearsal Director**

Shay Bland is from Englewood, NJ. She began her formal dance training at The Ailey School in 2007 where she was a scholarship student in the Junior Division. She is a graduate of the Professional Performing Arts School (PPAS), and has danced with several companies including Ailey II, Elisa Monte Dance, Nimbus Dance Theater, Von Howard Project, Francesca Harper Project, Ray Mercer Collective, Kachal Dance, and The Metropolitan Opera Ballet. Ms. Bland has worked on projects on and off-Broadway including *The Visitor* (off-Broadway) as associate choreographer, and as assistant choreographer for the 13-time nominated Broadway show *Hell's Kitchen*. She was also lead choreographer for Nebraska High School Theater Academy (NHSTA) in conjunction with Omaha Performing Arts. As an educator, Ms. Bland serves as a faculty member at Pace University, The Ailey School, Manhattan Youth Ballet, and Earl Mosley's Institute of the Arts (EMIA).

## AILEY II WHO'S WHO

**KAMANI ABU** (New Castle, DE) began his dance training at the age of 16 at a local studio in his hometown. He also trained in the summer intensive at BalletX. He is a recent graduate of the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program, and has worked with choreographers including Jennifer Archibald, Tracy Inman, Darshan Bhuller, Gregory Dawson, and Maleek Washington. In 2023, Abu performed in Geoffrey Holder's *Douglas* with Dance Theatre of Harlem and in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's New York City Center season. This is his first season with Ailey II.

**JADA AMMONS** (Los Angeles, CA) began her dance training at the Debbie Allen Dance Academy. She earned her BFA in Dance from Point Park University in 2022 and graduated from The Ailey School's Certificate Program in 2025. Ammons also trained in the School's Summer Intensive where she was the recipient of the Oprah Winfrey Foundation Scholarship. She has performed works by choreographers Debbie Allen, Renee Robinson, Ray Mercer, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Christopher L. Huggins, Ronald K. Brown, Branndi Lewis, and Freddie Moore. This is Ammons' first season with Ailey II.

**CARLEY CRUZAT BROOKS** (Chicago, IL) received her training at TDA Prep under the direction of Preston Miller and Jacqueline Green. Her studies include summer dance intensives with Jacob's Pillow, Nederlands Dans Theater, and Dance Theatre of Harlem. Brooks graduated from the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program, class of 2025. She has performed works by Alvin Ailey, Jiří Kylián, Ronald K. Brown, Hope Boykin, Marco Goecke, Jennifer Archibald, and Christopher L. Huggins. Her performance highlights include Geoffrey Holder's *Douglas* with Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's New York City Center season in 2023. This is Brooks' second season with Ailey II.

**MEREDITH BROWN** (Asheville, NC) began her dance training at a local studio in her hometown. She studied at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, and she is a recent graduate of the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program, where she performed in Alvin Ailey's *Festa Barroca* and *Memoria* during Ailey's 2022 and 2023 New York City Center seasons. Brown also danced in Hope Boykin's *Chasing the Spirit* at Jazz at Lincoln Center. She worked with Madison Hicks' "The Moving Forward Collective," and she is an alumna of the Jacob's Pillow Contemporary Program, where she worked with Sidra Bell, Rena Butler, and Antoine Vereecken. This is Brown's second season with Ailey II.

**CHRISTIAN BUTTS** (Atlanta, GA) began his dance training at Dancemakers of Atlanta under the direction of Lynise Heard and Denise Heard-Latimer. He also trained in the summer intensive programs at GALLIM School of Movement with Andrea Miller and A.I.M by Kyle Abraham. He has worked and performed pieces by Linda Celeste Sims and Glenn Allen Sims, Nattie Trogdon and Hollis Bartlett, Seán Curran, Michelle Thompson-Ulerich, and Kevin Wynn. In 2025, he graduated from SUNY Purchase receiving a BFA in Dance with a concentration in composition. This is his first season with Ailey II.

**JENNIFER M. GERKEN** (Houston, TX) began her dance training at age six. In 2016, she was accepted into Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. In 2019, Gerken received the Mary Martha Lappe Dance Scholarship and performed in an excerpt of *Appalachian Spring* by Martha Graham in the roles of the Bride and Follower. She was a student in the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program where she graduated in 2023. Gerken has performed works by William Forsythe, Mark Caserta, Ethan Colangelo, José Limón, and Paul Taylor. This is her second season with Ailey II.

**XAVIER LOGAN** (Atlanta, GA) trained at Dancemakers of Atlanta. He is a recent graduate of The Juilliard School and has worked with choreographers Medhi Walkerski, Tom Weinberger, Sharon Eyal, Jamar Roberts, Bobbi Jene Smith, and Or Schraiber, amongst others. Logan has been featured on *The Vampire Diaries*, *Dance Moms*, and *So You Think You Can Dance*. In 2023, his work *Welcome To The J(U)* premiered as the first ever hip-hop dance to appear on Juilliard's mainstage, and he was named one of Teen Vogue & GLAAD's "20 Under 20" rising stars. This is Logan's second season with Ailey II.

**XHOSA SCOTT** (Richmond, VA) was raised in Virginia where he began dancing with The School of Richmond Ballet's outreach program, Minds in Motion. He continued training at Baltimore School for the Arts, and attended summer intensives including the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and The Juilliard School. After graduating high school under the School of American Ballet, Scott attended The University of Virginia where he majored in Art History with a minor in Anthropology. While at The Ailey School in the Scholarship Program, he performed works by choreographers including Ronald K Brown, Amy Hall Garner, Ray Mercer, and Darrell Grand Moultrie. This is Scott's second season with Ailey II.

**ADANNA SMALLS** (Brooklyn, NY) began her formal dance training at the Abrons Arts Center/Henry Street Settlement. A 2021 graduate of the Professional Performing Arts School with a concentration in dance, she went on to complete the Certificate Program at The Ailey School. That same year, she performed in *Bird Lives!* and *Memoria* during Ailey's New York City Center season. Smalls had the opportunity to work with renowned choreographers including Clifton Brown, Norbert De La Cruz III, and Ronald K. Brown, and she previously served as an apprentice with Evidence, A Dance Company. This is her first season with Ailey II.

**DARION TURNER** (Clayton County, GA) began his dance training at AileyCamp Atlanta and attended Martha Ellen Stilwell School of the Arts. He studied as a scholarship student at Atlanta Ballet and Eagles Landing Dance Center. Turner is a graduate of the Certificate Program at The Ailey School and worked with choreographers Darrell Grand Moultrie, Christopher L. Huggins Anthony Burrell, Amy Hall Garner, Ronald K. Brown, Norbert De La Cruz, Brandi Lewis, Houston Thomas, and Baye & Asa. He also performed works by Robert Battle, Geoffrey Holder, and danced in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during AILEY's 2022 New York City Center season. This is Turner's second season with Ailey II.

**ERIC J. VIDAÑA** (Las Vegas, NV) is a graduate of the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts. He received his early dance training from The Nevada Ballet Theatre and continued studying at West Las Vegas Arts Center and Contemporary West Dance Theatre's Conservatory, under the direction of Bernard Gaddis and Avree Walker. Vidaña furthered his dance education as a Scholarship student at The Ailey School. He has performed works by choreographers including Alvin Ailey, Hope Boykin, Donald Byrd, Michelle Manzanales, Tommie Waheed Evans, Milton Myers, Jeneane Huggins, Don Bellamy, Rennie Harris, Ronald K. Brown, and Christopher L. Huggins. This is his second season with Ailey II.

**JORDYN WHITE** (West Palm Beach, FL) graduated from Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts high school. She began her dance training at Raskin Dance Studio in Florida and attended summer intensives at Joffrey Ballet School, Modas Dance, and The Ailey School. White has performed works by choreographers Houston Thomas, George Balanchine, Judith Jamison, and Ronald K. Brown, and danced in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2022 and 2023 New York City Center seasons. She is a recent graduate of The Ailey School's Certificate Program, and the University of Florida with a BA in Psychology. This is White's second season with Ailey II.

## APPRENTICES

**VIC E. DAVIS** (Atlanta, GA) is originally from Gaffney, South Carolina. He began his formal dance training at South Gwinnett High School in Atlanta, where he graduated with honors. He continued studying as a scholarship student at Gwinnett School of Dance, Northeast Atlanta Ballet, and Atlanta Dance Connection. Davis is currently a student at The Ailey School where he trains on scholarship and has performed works by choreographers including Christopher L. Huggins, Maleek Washington, and Clifford Williams. This is his first season as an apprentice with Ailey II.

**JAYDIN J. DE JESÚS** (West Hartford, CT) is a current senior in the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program. He received his early dance training at Studio 860 and continued his studies at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts high school. He has performed works by Alvin Ailey, Takehiro Ueyama, Martha Graham, Christopher L. Huggins, Pedro Ruiz, and Ray Mercer. This is De Jesús' first season as an apprentice with Ailey II.

**NAIA NEAL** (Aptos, CA) began her dance training at the age of seven at Dancenter, a local dance school in her hometown. She is a graduate from the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program, where she received the 2023 Denise Jefferson Memorial Scholarship. Neal has performed works by choreographers Christopher L. Huggins, Hope Boykin, Jonathan Lee, PeiJu Chien-Pott, Clifford Williams, Darshan Singh Bhuller, and Ephrat Asherie. She also danced in Alvin Ailey's *Memoria* during Ailey's 2023 New York City Center season and at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music) in 2024. This is Neal's second season as an apprentice with Ailey II.

**MICHELLE OSANYA** (Ames, IA) began her dance training at Robert Thomas Dancenter. She also attended summer intensives with LINES Ballet, Complexions Contemporary Ballet, and TDA Prep with Preston Miller and Jacqueline Green. Osanya is currently a junior in the Ailey/Fordham BFA in Dance program and has performed works by Adam Barruch, Burr Johnson, Adrienne Hurd, and Judith Jamison. In 2024, Osanya performed in Harrison Guy's *Can We Know the Sound of Forgiveness* at Carnegie Hall, and recently, she worked with choreographer Kyle Abraham and slowdanger at Springboard Danse. This is her first season as an apprentice with Ailey II.

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*\*In Memoriam*

**ALVIN AILEY DANCE FOUNDATION**  
*Recipient of a National Medal of Arts*

Bennett Rink, Executive Director of AILEY

**AILEY II PRODUCTION CREDITS**

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