

CHIP ALFRED, WRITER



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NO SHOW LIKE HOME
The Alvin Ailey Dance Company's
Home Spotlights the
Fight Against AIDS

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No Show like *Home*

The Alvin Ailey Dance Company's *Home* Spotlights the Fight Against HIV

by Chip Alfred

Deep where the sun don't shine
Is a place that I call home.
When the planetary alignment is right
And the DJ cuts out the lights
Deep is where I'm home.
—"Underground Is My Home" by Dennis
Ferrer from *Home*

The planets and the stars aligned for the world premiere of *Home*, a work inspired by the courageous stories of ten people affected by HIV. With high-energy hip-hop choreography by Rennie Harris, the Ailey company wowed the packed house on opening night with its unparalleled artistry and precision in a megawatt performance. Bringing the stamina of street dance to the stage, *Home* explores the

intersection of the club scene and communities of faith in the lives of those impacted by HIV/AIDS.

Presented at the newly-renovated historic New York City Center on World AIDS Day, *Home* honors the memory of founder Alvin Ailey, who died on December 1, 1989. The dance piece, which will be performed across the country on the company's 2012 national tour, represents the culmination of a year-long project sponsored by Bristol-Myers Squibb, the REYATAZ Fight HIV Your Way Contest [A&U, August, 2011]. More than 1,300 people from across the country submitted a photo and essay depicting their battle with HIV. The top ten winners received a trip to New York and tickets to see the Ailey company perform the dance

influenced by their contest entries. This marks the third installment of the Bristol-Myers Squibb contest, which highlights the struggles of people touched by HIV, helps reduce the stigma many still face, and encourages those infected with the virus to continue their fight.

"*Home* is a bold new work—Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's first-ever original dance to recognize the continued HIV epidemic. As long as AIDS exists, we're still fighting," said Robert Battle, who kicked off his inaugural season as the company's artistic director. Battle acknowledged the contest winners in the audience as he introduced *Home*, describing it as "a celebration of life. It is a tribute to Alvin Ailey's enduring spirit and pioneering legacy." The contest winners, who

were treated to a backstage meet and greet with Harris and the company's dancers, watched the show in awe. "It was brilliant, incredibly inspired and poignant," raved Kurt Weston, a Huntington Beach, California, photographer and artist living with AIDS and legally blind as a result. Dr. Sherry Meltz, a psychotherapist from Roswell, Georgia, who works with HIV-positive patients, exclaimed, "I'm overwhelmed. It was probably one of the most phenomenal events I've ever attended in my entire life. I saw some of everybody's story in it. It's about living positively and productively and hopefully."

"Ailey's mission has always been



Choreographer Rennie Harris (center, left) and artistic director Robert Battle (center, right) with dancers backstage at the world premiere of *Home*

PHOTO BY MARK DYE



Matthew Rushing and company at the final rehearsal for *Home*

about using dance to celebrate the human spirit and bringing new works to life that share important stories," said Judith Jamison, who succeeded Alvin Ailey and served as the company's artistic director for more than twenty years. "This tradition aligns perfectly with the Fight HIV Your Way initiative by using the power of the arts to raise awareness about a very significant issue."

The evening of dance featuring *Home* as the centerpiece belonged to Alvin Ailey, the man who founded what has become one of the most celebrated dance companies in the world. Choreographer Christopher L. Huggins opened the show with *Anointed*, a moving segment about Ailey passing the torch to Jamison before he passed away.

Revelations, choreographed by Alvin Ailey and performed by his company for the past fifty-one years, closed the show in signature Ailey style. The legendary dance suite still thrills with contemporary gospel music and African-American spirituals—taking the audience on a roller coaster ride of emotions, and nobody in the house seemed ready for the ride to end.

"Dance is for everybody. I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people," Ailey once said. "I am trying to show the world that we are all human beings," he explained, at the time referring to racial barriers and discrimination. Now his words resonate as well with people

impacted by the disease that claimed his life. The Alvin Ailey dance company delivered an unforgettable homage to its creator, a truly remarkable man whose light shines on. *Essence* Magazine writes, "You don't just see an Ailey performance, you feel it." It's doubtful anyone walked out of the theater that night feeling the same as when they walked in.

For more information about the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, visit alvinailey.org. To see the winning photos and essays of the Fight HIV Your Way contest, visit fightHIVyourway.com.

Chip Alfred interviewed designer Kenneth Cole for the November 2011 cover story.