

# Artsource

The Music Center's Study Guide  
to the Performing Arts

TRADITIONAL

CLASSICAL

CONTEMPORARY

EXPERIMENTAL

MULTI-MEDIA

ARTISTIC PERCEPTION (AP)

CREATIVE EXPRESSION (CE)

HISTORICAL &amp; CULTURAL CONTEXT (H/C)

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TRANSFORMATION

ENDURING  
VALUESFREEDOM &  
OPPRESSIONTHE POWER  
OF NATURETHE HUMAN  
FAMILY

## Title of Work:

*Revelations*

## Creators:

Company: The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater  
Choreographer: Alvin Ailey (1931-1989)  
Music: traditional black spirituals and gospel songs  
[www.alvinailey.org](http://www.alvinailey.org)

## Background Information:

Alvin Ailey was born in Texas, but moved to Los Angeles when he was twelve. On a junior high school class trip to a performance of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, he discovered ballet. Later he was inspired by a performance of the Katherine Dunham Company, featuring dances from Africa, Haiti and Latin America. Mr. Ailey began his formal dance training with Lester Horton, a west coast modern dance pioneer and founder of the first racially integrated dance company in this country. His independent career began when, after Horton's death, he directed the company until it disbanded. In 1958, he formed The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, based in New York. The Ailey Company performs classical ballet and modern works by well-known choreographers, but is best known for pieces drawn from Mr. Ailey's African American background. These masterpieces capture the essence of his black experience in America and feature music and material based on African American cultural heritage such as blues, spirituals and jazz. During his lifetime he choreographed seventy-nine ballets.

## About The Artwork:

As a child, Alvin Ailey attended Sunday school at The Baptist Young People's Union. It was these

experiences that inspired *Revelations*. Choreographed in 1960, it has become the 'signature piece' for the company. A signature piece is a dance which clearly captures the spirit and aesthetics of a given group and its artistic director. This dance, which has been seen by audiences world-wide, celebrates the human spirit and its ability to overcome adversity. In it there are several sections which evoke strong emotions by expressing through movement the joy and strength of the music and capturing a sense of personal freedom, wit and humanity. The beginning formation of the dance is particularly memorable as a tight grouping of men and women reach out in unison, conveying powerful feelings of support, dignity and hope.

## Creative Process of the Artist or Culture:

Alvin Ailey allowed the music he selected to influence his ideas and his choreography. To communicate the feelings in his works to an audience, he selected dancers with both technical ability and strong personalities. In addition to works by Alvin Ailey, other black choreographers, such as Donald McKayle, create dances for the company. Since Mr. Ailey's death, Judith Jamison, one of his most well-known dancers, has taken over the helm as artistic director.

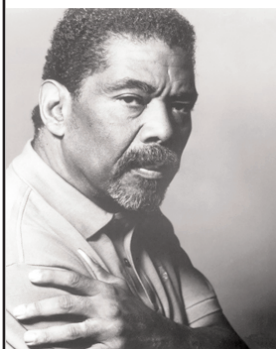


Photo: Eric N. Hong

"One needs dancers  
to make dances, so I  
made a company."  
Alvin Ailey

