Ailey, Alvin (1931-1989) Encyclopedia Article

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Choreographer and dancer Alvin Ailey transformed the U.S. dance scene in the 1960s with his work *Revelations,* a powerful and moving dance which expresses Black experiences set to gospel music. By the 1980s this dance had been performed more often than *Swan Lake.* As the founder of the interracial Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in 1958, Ailey was an important and beloved figure in the establishment of Black artists in the American mainstream. His company was one of the first integrated American dance companies to gain international fame.

Other artists did not always share his vision of Black dance and accused his creations of commercialism. After early success and a stressful career, Ailey's creativity waned in the late 1970s. Manic depression and arthritis undermined his health. He tried to find refuge in drugs, alcohol, and gay bars, and died of an AIDS related disease in 1989. His company continues under the direction of Judith Jamison, a dancer who inspired Ailey's 1971 creation of a dance to honor Black women called *Cry.*

Alvin Ailey

Further Reading:

Dunning, Jennifer. *Alvin Ailey. A Life in Dance.* New York, Da Capo Press, 1998.