

OCEAN DRIVE



collective movement

THE ALVIN AILEY DANCE FOUNDATION
CELEBRATES THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS
TRANSFORMATIONAL AND INSPIRATIONAL
AILEYCAMP MIAMI FOR CHILDREN.

BY AIMEE DINGWELL



Instructor Tina Monica Williams with AileyCamp alum Zomora De La Rosa, who has been accepted into the dance company's intensive summer program.

Onstage at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County, moving in and out of sharp shadows falling from overhead lights, are 100 children ages 11 to 14, boys, girls, all shapes and sizes, but dancing as one. United in movement, their smiles are as wide as their sashays, split leaps, and outstretched arms. The freedom and joy of this group belies the struggles many of these children face when they are offstage, out of the studio, not dancing, writing, and exploring the power of expression.

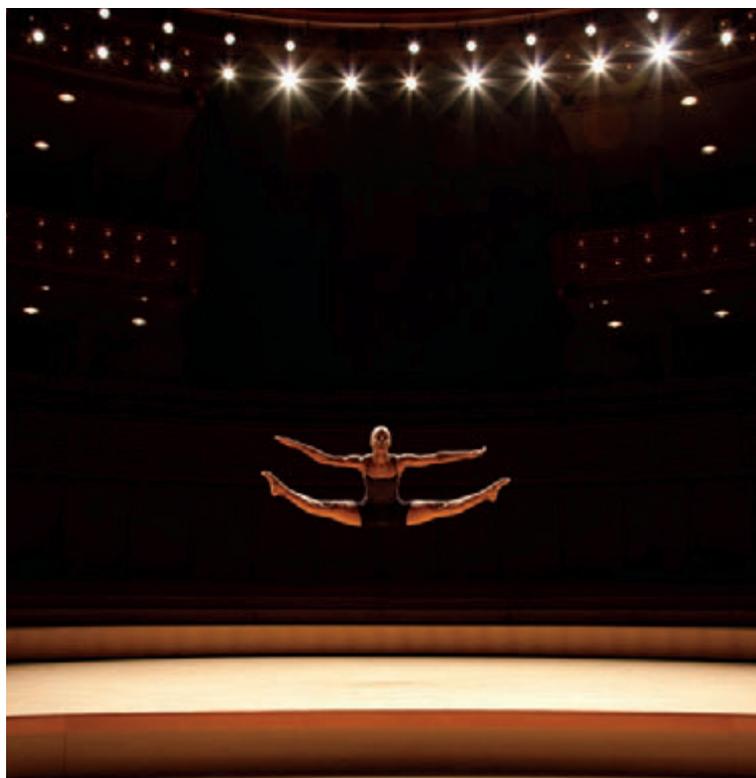
They're part of a program in which the esteemed Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation chooses select underprivileged youngsters from nine cities across the US each summer to participate in AileyCamp, a six-week regimen of disciplined dance training, creative writing and art, and personal development.

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SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY



FROM LEFT: Wisly Bernard (FRONT) and fellow AileyCampers participating in a dance class; Zomora De La Rosa credits the program with helping her grow both as a dancer and as a person.



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The aim is to enable campers to develop their own voices, self-love, and respect for others. Alvin Ailey himself held that “Dance is for everybody,” and strongly believed in using dance to enhance the lives of underserved children. Many have dreams of becoming professional dancers one day themselves, while some just want to have fun or learn about the arts.

Either way, their lives are about to be transformed. “I see almost a thousand children every summer in our nine programs. And I see the same needs and same desires and wishes in a child in California as I do in a child in Miami,” says Nasha Thomas-Schmitt, national director of AileyCamp, a spokesperson and master teacher for Arts in Education, and a former principal dancer for 12 years. “And that’s basically to be heard. And to think.”

Thomas-Schmitt, who has overseen the AileyCamps since 1999, has a unique perspective: “I am myself a product. I grew up in the projects.” And while she notes that her mother worked hard to offer her exposure to different experiences, “a lot of these young people do not [have those advantages],” she says. “It’s amazing to ask a child what they think, what they feel about a color, and they tell you they don’t know. Sometimes they’re afraid; sometimes they don’t know what to say. They can’t believe someone is asking their opinion and that it’s valid. We do a lot of writing in our personal development class, and a lot of exploring, and the stories they have and they’re experiencing are heart wrenching.”

Campers are from grades six through eight, and enter a demanding, rigorous program. While previous dance experience is not a factor in selection, campers must be willing to show up and be ready to learn to dance, from 8:30 to 3:30 each day. They take three to four dance classes every day and find their voice through arts, while learning perspective on conflict resolution, self-esteem, peer pressure, nutrition, and how to be the best they can be.

While camp uniforms—leotards, tights, and ballet shoes—and breakfast and lunch are provided, campers must agree to provide something else: a healthy attitude and a commitment to themselves and the program. Dance is simply the

“I see the same desires in a child in California as I do in a child in Miami.”—NASHA THOMAS-SCHMITT

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LIFE TRANSFORMATION

AileyCamp alum Zomora De La Rosa is one step closer to achieving her dreams.

AS TOLD TO AIMEE DINGWELL

I was an AileyCamper in 2010 and returned again in 2011 to help. Now I’m 16 and in the 10th grade at New World School of the Arts, studying dance. I’ve been dancing since I was 7, but what I like about AileyCamp is that it’s interview-based and not competitive. It’s for everybody. But if you want to be a dancer, you can work on your training every day. Most kids, you could see they didn’t have training. But it’s okay, because everybody wanted to be there and it wasn’t a competition.

In that way, it was a huge opportunity for me to find myself and build my self-esteem with other kids. I also learned to be a leader and not a follower. And I have more confidence in myself, in my dancing, and as a person—that was probably the hardest part—because every day, we had 10 affirmations we’d say as a group. We’d say, “I am a leader. I am a winner.” And that built everybody’s self-esteem.

AileyCamp has changed me—it helped me grow, with my dance and in my everyday world. I can open up with my family better, talk about things, and move on from little issues we’re going through. I can trust more in myself and in others.

At first I was a little doubtful about being a dancer, being confident about who I am and can I make it to my dream of going to New York to dance. My goal is to be a professional dancer, and I want to go to Ailey. I want to be in the company. And now, I’m so happy because I’ve been accepted into its summer intensive program! That was one of my first goals, my first steps, to my highest goal.



LEFT: AileyCamp Miami campers during a rehearsal in the Arsht Center's Knight Concert Hall; BELOW: AileyCamp Miami and Arsht Center directors hosted an AileyCamp Miami reunion in 2012.

resonates in our offices,” says M. John Richard, Arsht Center president and CEO. “You’ll often see on our doors the daily 10 affirmations of the camp, not the least of which is ‘I will not use the word can’t to define my possibilities.’ So we live it, we breathe it, and it’s in our DNA. And it’s magnified by their presence and how alive they make these buildings come.”

Entering its fifth summer, AileyCamp Miami was founded on the idea, says Richard, that the experience for the kids collectively is engagement and discipline

in the art of dance, but more importantly to create a greater sense of self-esteem. “It isn’t the outcome goal that the dancers are going to end up with the Ailey Foundation or the Miami City Ballet. It’s about that crucial intersection of time that they

are in middle school and they need to discover each other, who they are, and that the experience be robust in the development of

positive self-esteem.”

Beginning June 24, the camp culminates in a final performance at the Arsht Center’s Knight Concert Hall on Saturday, August 3. “One of the highlights of my year, every single year, is the final performance, when 1,600 to 1,700 parents and guardians attend,” says Richard. “I wouldn’t miss that for the world.” **OD**

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vehicle through which the campers learn a sense of accomplishment and responsibility.

“Dance, and all of the arts, requires follow-through. You can’t start a class and not complete it,” says Thomas-Schmitt.

“It doesn’t happen by osmosis. You have to work. Dance requires discipline, focus, and commitment. And anything they want to do—whether they want to be a soccer player or a cook—requires the same elements.”

This lesson is part of 10 daily affirmations the campers recite every morning and at the end of every day. The affirmations are so powerful, in fact, that the entire Arsht Center staff often adopts them. “For that six-week period, with the kids and teachers being here day in and day out, there’s an energy that

“I will not use can’t to define my possibilities.”

—AILEYCAMP AFFIRMATION



HOW TO HELP

AileyCamp Miami is an Adrienne Arsht Center program that’s supported by the Miami-Dade County mayor, the Board of County Commissioners, the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, The Children’s Trust, the state of Florida, Amerigroup Foundation, and the AileyCamp Miami Encore Circle of supporters. It’s run by locally based instructors, interns, and volunteers, and welcomes your help and financial support and contribution. *To get involved, visit alvinailey.org or arshtcenter.org.*

Charity Register

OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE.

STYLE SAVES

Cause: Efforts to provide personalized outfits to underprivileged children on their first day of school.

President and founder: Rachael Russell

Event: Third annual Summer Fashion Show fundraiser, Style Saves Swim, Friday, July 19, at 9 PM, Soho Beach House; stylesaves.org

SHARE OUR STRENGTH

Cause: Easing access to food in order to end childhood hunger in America.

Event chair: Chef Allen Susser

Event: Taste of the Nation South Florida, Thursday, July 25, at 6 PM, Loews Miami Beach Hotel; strengthflorida.org



MAKE-A-WISH SOUTHERN FLORIDA

Cause: Grants the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope, strength, and joy.

Event chair: Meagan Malo

Event: 15th annual Dream Date auction, Friday, July 26, at 7 PM, Exit 66; dreamdateauction.net

VOICES FOR CHILDREN FOUNDATION

Cause: To advocate for children who are abused, neglected, or abandoned and who are involved in dependency proceedings.

Event chair: Marling Obando

Event: Mad For A Cause, Saturday, August 17, at 11 AM, the Miami Beach Resort; voices4.org



EASTER SEALS SOUTH FLORIDA

Cause: Education and support for people living with autism and other disabilities.

President and CEO: Luanne Welch

Event: Small Miracles luncheon, Friday, August 23, at 11:30 AM, Jungle Island; easterseals.com

