



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

HARLEM STAGE CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF ITS VISIONARY WATERWORKS COMMISSIONING FELLOWSHIP IN A LANDMARK INAUGURAL PARTNERSHIP WITH AILEY

Two Cultural Powerhouses Unite to Champion the Next Generation of Choreographers

(New York, NY - September 10, 2025) - **Harlem Stage**, a world-renowned cultural anchor dedicated to amplifying the voices of artists of the Global Majority with the singular mission *to set untold stories free*, is proud to announce the 20th anniversary of its groundbreaking WATERWORKS Commissioning Fellowship initiative through a landmark new partnership with the **AILEY organization**, which includes the iconic **Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater** and **The Ailey School**. Four choreographers from within the AILEY community have been selected to develop and premiere original works as part of Harlem Stage's 2025–2026 season, furthering a shared mission to support and to amplify choreographers and dancers of the Global Majority.

- **Kamani Abu** (Ailey II and Ailey/Fordham, BFA, 2025 Graduate)
- **Derick McKoy, Jr** (Ailey/Fordham, BFA, 2019 Graduate)
- **Naia Neal** (Ailey II Apprentice and Ailey/Fordham, BFA, 2025 Graduate)
- **Kasey Orava** (Ailey/Fordham, BFA, 2025 Graduate)

For two decades, WATERWORKS has stood as a sanctuary for fearless performance-making, commissioning artists whose works interrogate, inspire, and reimagine the contours of the field. The program embodies Harlem Stage's unwavering commitment to the artist community and affirms a core principle: that artists not only deserve, but require the space, resources, and radical freedom to create without constraint.

Through this partnership, selected choreographers will receive a commissioning fee; free rehearsal space at Harlem Stage; mentorship from an established dance artist; monthly artistic development meetings; a works-in-progress showing in December 2025; and the premiere of their commissioned work during Harlem Stage's *E-Moves* Festival in Spring 2026.

The *WATERWORKS* Adjudication Panel is **Ronald K. Alexander**, Member of the Harlem Stage Board of Directors and Faculty at Alvin Ailey School and Instructor at Ailey Extension;

Dr. Indira Etwaroo, CEO & Artistic Director at Harlem Stage; **Melanie Person**, Co-Director of the Ailey School and Director of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program; and **Calvin Royal III**, Principal Dancer at American Ballet Theatre.

The list of past WATERWORKS' fellows includes a Who's Who of performing artists including Stew, Vijay Iyer, Jason Moran, Bill T. Jones, Nora Chipaumire, Craig Harris, Camille A. Brown, Randy Weston, Andrew Hill, Ronald K. Brown, Tamar-kali, Kyle Abraham, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar.

"Twenty years ago, Harlem Stage launched WATERWORKS with a simple, but radical belief that artists of the Global Majority hold the blueprints for our cultural future. Today, this commissioning initiative has grown into a living archive of innovation and truth-telling," shared **Dr. Indira Etwaroo**, Artistic Director and CEO of Harlem Stage. "This inaugural collaboration with the American cultural treasure, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, signals a new chapter; one rooted in legacy, yet reaching toward what's next. We're not just supporting dance-makers; we're expanding upon spaces where movement becomes memory, and memory becomes movement. This is about cultivating brilliance, honoring our centuries-old continuum, and shaping the next wave of artmakers."

"All of us at AILEY congratulate Harlem Stage on the 20th anniversary of WATERWORKS, which has set the stage for so many to share their stories through dance, including numerous past fellows who have also choreographed for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater," stated Artistic Director **Alicia Graf Mack**. "Alvin Ailey said that 'Making dances is an act of progress; it is an act of growth, an act of music, an act of teaching, an act of celebration, an act of joy.' With our shared history, community, and cultural vision, we are thrilled to celebrate with Harlem Stage in a partnership providing opportunities for emerging choreographers from the AILEY community creating with gifted dancers from The Ailey School during a landmark season of continued creativity and progress."

Once part of New York City's Old Croton Aqueduct system, the historic Harlem Stage Gatehouse brought life-sustaining water to millions and, today, the institution channels something just as essential: bold, truth-telling art that reflects the exquisite and powerful intersectional diversity of New York City and the world.

For additional information about Harlem Stage, please visit harlemstage.org

About Harlem Stage

Harlem is Our Home. The World is Our Stage.

Harlem Stage, a 42-year-old radical socio-cultural artistic laboratory, inspires world class, innovative works by artists of the Global Majority to ignite artistic freedom. It is the STAGE to set untold stories free. *The New York Times* has hailed Harlem Stage as "an invaluable incubator of talent" and Vijay Iyer has shared, "It is shockingly rare that artists of color are invited to become full participants in the national conversation, to respond to today's world, and to offer a glimpse of tomorrow. I've looked all over for arts organizations that might prioritize new and cutting-edge work by artists of color, and Harlem Stage stands out as one of the only presenters

in the U.S. that makes this their goal.” Iyer is one of many visionary artists who joined Harlem Stage in the earlier stages of their careers to create within this incubator of the future and he, along with four others within the Harlem Stage family, have joined the ranks of MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship awardees: Kyle Abraham, Bill T. Jones, Jason Moran, and Cecil Taylor.

Harlem Stage, neighbor to Columbia University and The City College of New York, welcomes audiences from all walks of life to its home, the historic site in West Harlem that was once a part of the Croton Aqueduct system—a great engineering feat of the 19th century—which supplied much needed fresh drinking water to New York City, beginning in 1890, twenty-seven years following the Emancipation Proclamation. The Romanesque Revival style accounts for much of the building’s grandeur and monumental beauty.

About AILEY

Legacy in Motion

Founded by Alvin Ailey in 1958 and forged during a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater uplifts the African American experience and furthers the American modern dance tradition while transcending boundaries of race, faith, and nationality with its universal celebration of the human spirit. Recognized as a “vital American Cultural Ambassador to the World,” it is one of the most acclaimed dance companies worldwide having performed in more than 70 countries on six continents. Before his untimely death in 1989, Mr. Ailey named Judith Jamison as his successor, and for 21 years she brought the company to unprecedented success. Alicia Graf Mack, widely celebrated for her dance artistry during her years with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, was appointed artistic director of AILEY as of July 1, 2025

Alvin Ailey’s groundbreaking legacy continues to enlighten, entertain and inspire through AILEY’s dance performances, training, educational and community programs, including: Ailey II (1974), a second performing company of emerging young dancers in works by innovative choreographers; The Ailey School (1969), a world renowned educational institution offering the highest caliber of multidisciplinary dance training; Ailey Arts In Education & Community Programs (1992), which cultivates and energizes youth and older adults to take, make, and see dance through pioneering outreach programs; and Ailey Extension (2005), which offers dance and fitness classes to the general public, beginning with the opening of AILEY’s permanent home in New York City—The Joan Weill Center for Dance—New York’s largest building dedicated to dance. For more information, visit ailey.org.

###

Media Contacts:

Nina Flowers

Nina@Flowerspragency.com