

# THE AILEY SCHOOL

## PROFESSIONAL DIVISION COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Our curriculum offers 12-15 dance technique and somatic classes per week. Some programs also include creative studies courses, dance academics, and ensemble performance experience.

*Techniques and levels offered are subject to change without notice.*

### **DANCE COURSES: TECHNIQUE, SOMATIC, AND PERFORMANCE**

#### **BALLET – Melanie Person, Chairperson**

##### **Ballet II**

Simple basic exercises begin at the barre. These exercises develop the muscles of the legs, their turn-out, extension and plié as well as their coordination with the torso, arms and head. In addition, elementary movement coordination is taught as well as the proper distribution of body weight over both legs and on one leg; mastery of the positions of the feet and arms are focused on intently. Concepts of en dedans, en dehors, demi-pointe on both legs and one leg are also introduced. Transition steps such as glissade, pas de bourré, soutenu, etc. are mastered at this level. Simple jumps are done in the center. Short combinations with long jumps and waltz steps, pas de bourrées are done across the floor.

##### **Ballet III**

Exercises done at the barre develop greater speed, strength, flexibility and coordination of the legs, torso, arms and head. More of the barre-work is done on demi-pointe for increased strength and balance. Stretches are given to develop increased flexibility in the hips and legs for higher extensions and better turn out. The fundamental ballet directions are taught in the center. Simple jump combinations are taught and reversed and include simple beats. Pirouettes in the basic positions are mastered. Big jumps traveling across the floor focus on covering space.

##### **Ballet IV**

This level develops strength and flexibility with the execution of more complicated combinations at the barre and in the center. Students must be able to change and use different dynamics of movement and attack in the legs and feet. Barre-work involves quick changes of direction, quick weight changes from one leg to the other and more sustained adagios. Balances in different positions are important additions to the end of each combination. Center work includes adagios with rises on demi-pointe, promenades and slow controlled pirouettes. Petit allegro incorporates beats and directional changes using épaulement. Grand allegro requires students to be able to execute grand jeté en tournant, saut de chat, saut de basque and other expansive jumps that challenge their strength and stamina and allow them to enjoy moving through space.

##### **Ballet V**

This advanced intermediate level is for students who are ready to experience the full range of exercises that require larger, more expansive movements that test their strength and stability. Higher extensions, multiple pirouettes, petit allegro with batterie, grand allegro and quick transfer of weight and the power of the legs and body are emphasized.

## **Ballet VI**

This advanced level includes exercises at the barre to refine the feet, legs, arms and head. Exercises that build higher extensions and increased turn out are given with varying rhythms. Adagios are done at a slow tempo for control and strength; in contrast, very fast exercises develop speed and precision. More stretching develops greater suppleness and ease of movement. Complicated small jumps with beats, multiple turns, changes in direction and coordination of the feet, arms and head are emphasized in the center work. Longer adagios demand high extensions, sustained pirouettes, balance and musicality. Long grand allegro combinations with big jumps and turns build strength, stamina and power. Pointe work is executed in the center and traveling in big combinations across the floor. At this level, dynamic artistry and musicality are emphasized.

## **Ballet VII**

Ballet seven is a springboard to the professional dance career. Class enrollment is kept low which allows the students in this level to receive more focused coaching, raising the standard of technique and artistry in the students. Students at this highest level have achieved a high level of mastery of the execution of the ballet technique, placement and alignment. Students work to further advance their technical abilities, with a strong emphasis on artistic and performance achievement. This level continues refinement of the feet, legs, arms and head at the barre. Technical precision is emphasized to highlight the quality of movement as a platform for artistic expression. Center work combinations include more intricate sequencing, musicality and execution of the steps. Students are challenged with more difficult choreography and dance to a wider range of music. As the students work to improve and polish their technique, they are encouraged to mentally prepare themselves to cope with the rigorous demands of a professional career. Pointe work is introduced at the end of class.

## **Jumps and Turns (beg.)**

These classes build the strength, stamina and technical skills needed by dancers. There is a strong emphasis on alignment, strength and coordination. In all classes, barre-work focuses on alignment, balance, strength and flexibility with a focus on basic and fundamental principles of alignment, use of plie, use of feet and port de bras. This beginning level class offers an introduction to the turning technique. Emphasis is placed on the development of ballon to increase elevation in jumps.

### ***Minimum level requirements: Ballet III and IV***

## **Jumps and Turns (int./advanced)**

This class builds strength, stamina, and technical skills that are essential in today's dancer. Barre-work focuses on alignment, balance, strength and flexibility. In intermediate and advanced classes, center combinations build to multiple grand pirouettes, increased elevation and jumps with batterie. Combinations across the floor emphasize grand allegro and the ability to cover space.

### ***Minimum level requirements: Ballet V, VI, and VII***

## **Pointe (beg.)**

Exercises at the barre build strength, articulation and flexibility in the feet and legs while developing the ability to control the balance on pointe. Center work follows with short adagio work for control and balance. Small jumps in the center prepare for traveling combinations across the floor.

### ***Minimum level requirements: Ballet IV, V, VI, and VII***

**Pointe (int.)**

More complex exercises at the barre build increased strength, articulation and flexibility in the feet, legs, and torso. Longer adagio work at the barre and in the center develops extensions, control, balance, and turns. Small jumps with beats and pointe work in the center are followed by longer traveling combinations that develop expressiveness and musicality while building greater technical skills.

***Minimum level requirements: Ballet V***

**Pointe (adv.)**

At the advanced level, there is a strong emphasis on the refinement of the technique. Ballet barre en pointe stresses transfer of weight and balances to build increased strength in the feet, turnout in the legs and core strength. Center work includes more complex combinations including pirouettes in open positions. At this level, a dancer should be able to execute allegro movements en pointe with sharpness and attack, and adagio movements with softness and fluidity. Variations from the classical repertoire are learned and virtuosity en pointe is developed.

***Minimum level requirements: Ballet VI and VII***

**Ballet Partnering (beginning and intermediate)**

Working together as one is the essence of partnering. It is the technique of lifts, supported turns and balances. It involves a cohesive physical communication between two people that emulates the design of the choreographer. Partners must execute all movements with coordination to create a fluid design; the hand coordination of the dancer are essential to facilitate a partner's execution. These partnering classes include movements both from traditional ballet choreography as well as contemporary works.

***Minimum level requirements: Beginning Partnering: Ballet III, IV, V, intermediate pointe***

***Minimum level requirements: Intermediate Partnering: Ballet V, VI, VII, intermediate or advanced pointe***

**Barre a Terre (all levels)**

A supplemental class for intermediate and advanced students, this class develops in the student a balance of strength, flexibility and endurance. Work on placement and alignment is done while lying on the floor, using both turned out and parallel positions. Instruction is given on the proper use of energy as a means to lengthen muscles and freeing the body from improper tension. Injury prevention and the maintenance of a healthy body are focused on intently. Specific Pilates based exercises are taught that accelerate the training process. Work in turned-out positions and the elongation of muscles through proper use of breath and energy are some of the basic components of this class. The last half-hour of class is a standing barre that requires the students to apply their experiences from the floor-work. Depending on the class size, additional work may involve specific coaching based on each dancer's needs and challenges.

**MODERN TECHNIQUES****GRAHAM – Jacquelyn Buglisi, Chairperson**

*Required course*

**Graham I**

This introductory class in

Graham technique teaches the basic vocabulary rooted in the contraction and release for advanced beginners. This technique divides the class into 3 equal segments: floor-work, standing work in the

center and combinations that travel across the floor. The floor-work develops a strong expressive torso as the source of movement with simple breathing exercises that build to contraction and release exercises in various positions. The spiral position of the back leads into turns around the back in 4th position, adding the legs with the back leg extension series. Standing exercises in the center emphasize the use of the leg and the coordination of the legs, arms and torso with the contraction and release and oppositional spiral of the torso in relation to the legs. Short combinations in the center and across the floor focus on covering space and shifting weight.

### **Graham II**

The floor-work becomes more complex with lengthier exercises that emphasize the drama of the contraction and release and spiral of the back. The use of the legs and arms from the back is emphasized as an extension of the torso, neck and head. In 4th position, a coiling of the body's weight into the center in preparation for standing is developed. Standing work in the center develops the ability to shift the weight and work off center. More complicated traveling combinations incorporate the contraction and release, spiral, jumps and moving fully with weight, power, and dynamic changes.

### **Graham III**

This level continues to build strength with an awareness of the torso as the center and initiator of all movement. Spiral, contraction and release exercises become longer and more complex, using the legs more often. Opposition and weight shifts are emphasized, building a stronger movement vocabulary, increased dynamic range and more control. The weight of the body is further explored in primary falling combinations from sitting positions and the knees. Standing work in the center develops more stamina, balance, control, flexibility and expanded sense of movement through extended combinations with contraction and release, leg extensions, plié series and shifts of weight. The centering of the body is heightened with falls to the floor from standing positions off center and pitch turns. Elevation in jumps is emphasized. Longer traveling combinations often use difficult rhythms and contracting spirals along with more complicated movement phrases that call for dramatic expressiveness, use of weight and musicality.

### **Graham IV**

Technical skills are honed at this advanced professional level. Breathing, a gathering and releasing of tension is heightened, increasing versatility in the work. Phrases of movement are emphasized throughout the floor-work. More complicated, longer combinations in the center build control and balance while working on and off center. Leg extensions are higher and the full integration of the legs, arms and head with the torso as the center and the catalyst of all movement is achieved. The body now moves as a whole, not as individual parts. There is no longer a separation of the floor, standing and traveling work, but all are combined in lengthy combinations as an expressive, dramatic, and technically advanced vocabulary. Performance skills are coached, particularly the dramatic expression of the individual.

## **AILEY HORTON TECHNIQUE – Ana Marie Forsythe, Chairperson**

### *Required course*

#### **Ailey Horton I**

This beginning level for advanced beginners lays the groundwork for all that follows in the advanced levels. The following basic warmup exercises are taught; flat backs, primitive squat, descent and ascent, lateral stretches, release swings, leg swings, deep lunges, and coccyx balance. The shapes that will be used throughout the training in Horton technique are emphasized: the T positions, stag position, cross lunge and coccyx balance. The Horton technique was designed with studies to stretch and strengthen different areas of the body. Many of the beginning level studies which are taught focus

on the Achilles tendon, the abdominal muscles, and movements that lengthen the spine and the hamstring muscles. Simple movement combinations that include turns and jumps are taught to introduce musicality and dynamics to the beginning dancer's vocabulary. Performance qualities are emphasized at the very beginning of the dancer's training.

### **Ailey Horton II**

This level uses the basic Horton warm-up with more variations. Many of the positions and shapes developed earlier are used in turns, jumps and in combinations of movement. More demanding studies are added which require more stretch and strength in the quadriceps and abdominal muscles. Hinges at the barre and falls are included in this level. The movements across the floor are longer and require more concentration and focus from the dancers. The introduction of canons and rhythmical patterns are stressed as well as the development of dynamics and projection.

### **Ailey Horton III**

The warm-up in this level includes exercises to stretch and strengthen the legs, hips and spine. The center floor-work includes longer studies like the Figure 4 and Percussive Stroke Studies which require the dancers to remember long sequences of movements, counts and dynamics. The combinations of movements across the floor are more complicated musically and technically and challenge the dancers to learn movement quickly. The combinations include material just introduced as well as vocabulary learned in the other levels. The performance aspects of dance are emphasized.

### **Ailey Horton IV**

The warm-up now includes a long study, Dimensional Tonus, which incorporates many aspects of the warm-up into a complicated and demanding dance phrase. The center and floor work use hinges and falls with more frequency and the combinations of movements are long, sophisticated movement phrases that require strength, speed and flexibility. Individualized coaching on performance and technique is given at this advanced/professional level.

### **JAZZ AND HIP HOP – Holly Wright, Chairperson**

***Minimum level requirements:*** Students in ballet II and III may take Jazz II; Students in ballet III may take Hip Hop; Students in ballet IV may take Jazz III and Hip Hop.

#### **Jazz II**

This class for advanced beginners begins with a standing warm-up that develops the body's proper alignment, flexibility and control. Exercises follow that isolate the different parts of the body and develop increasingly complex coordination of the arms, head and legs. Longer combinations that emphasize expressiveness in lyrical and dynamic Broadway styles are given in the center and across the floor.

#### **Jazz III**

This intermediate/advanced level begins with a fast-paced standing warm-up that emphasizes proper placement, increased flexibility and control. Isolation exercises and short combinations focusing on extensions and turns are done in the center. Long sections of jazz choreography in contrasting styles are given in the center and across the floor. Students are coached on performance skills (focus, dynamic contrast, musicality, etc.).

## **Hip Hop**

This class incorporates the fundamentals of hip hop such as popping, locking, and b-boying with cutting edge choreography. Skills on preparing dancers for auditioning in the commercial dance industry will also be addressed.

## **ELECTIVES**

### **Contemporary**

This intermediate level class explores traditional modern dance and ballet concepts, yoga, and athletic training, as they relate to approaching current contemporary dance. The warmup begins on the floor as a means of opening the spine, backs of the legs, and abdominals. A series of yoga poses are used as a transition to stand. Center work fusing both modern and ballet is designed to improve harmony of movement. The class will focus on alignment, form, nuanced execution and artistry, as well as explore various contemporary styles. Emphasis is on personal artistic expression, musicality, strength, physical coordination and flexibility.

### **Dunham**

Barre-work is more complex and intense, building increased strength and stamina, particularly in the back and legs for advanced beginners. Exercises done at the barre and in the center emphasize balance, control and flexibility of the body. Longer combinations are done throughout the class and particularly with progressions across the floor, which include more jumps and turns. Live drumming accompanies this Afro-Caribbean technique class.

### **West African Dance**

This class for beginners brings together body, mind and spirit in an energetic union of music, dance and oral tradition of the people of West Africa. Students are taught regional songs and dances of welcome and praise such as; Lamban (Dance of Celebration), Mandjani (Challenge Dance), and Wolo Sodon Jon Don (Dance of Becoming Free). Each dance is accompanied by live drumming to provide students with an understanding of the relationship between the dance and musician and the common language they must speak in order to execute an African Dance style.

### **Tap**

An approach to tap dance that incorporates four instructional components: *first*, students learn a series of exercises to strengthen the arches and heels of the feet; *second*, a series of rhythm sequences are done that use syncopation, double and triple timing, hand claps, finger snaps and long breaks; *third*, students begin to learn simple choreography based on the exercises learned. Accompanied by music, students are encouraged to use all parts of their bodies and to develop more complex technical skills while tapping. Last, through a series of progressions, students learn to use the entire space of the room. Exercises are combined into short combinations travelling forwards, backwards, and side to side across the floor.

### **Body Conditioning**

Required of beginning students, this class is based on the Pilates exercise method of mind/body 'contrology'. The emphasis is on alignment, placement, posture, and injury prevention. The class is conducted with live accompaniment, utilizing rhythmical repetitions and flowing movements.

Concentration on body awareness, anatomy, correct body usage and breath control result in a strong, toned and fully functioning body.

### **Gyrokinesis®**

Gyrokinesis® is an exercise movement developed by Juliu Horvath, a professional dancer who developed a system of exercises that helped repair injuries he had sustained as a dancer. This exercise system is based on fluid movements that offer similar physical benefits of yoga, dance, and swimming, though it is not based on these or other specific exercise models. Gyrokinesis® exercises are designed to engage the entire body through spinal movement and joint articulation. Based on the body's natural ability to move forward and backward and side to side, the movements are designed to be rhythmic and fluid. Rather than specific postures or stances being held for long periods of time, Gyrokinesis® exercises are smoothly integrated, seeming more like dance than traditional yoga. Natural breathing patterns are also incorporated into Gyrokinesis® exercises.

### **Voice**

This course will cover the fundamentals and techniques of healthy and functional singing for the dancer/mover. During the semester you will learn the function of the breath, body, and vocal apparatus as it pertains to singing. As the course progresses, we will focus on how to tailor those techniques on stage while moving. Students will also learn a solo and ensemble piece and perform both at the end of the semester.

## **PERFORMANCE COURSES**

### **Repertory Workshops and Artist-in-Residence Workshops**

Repertory workshops are given throughout the year by a diverse group of Ailey School faculty members and guest artists to offer performance opportunities to intermediate and advanced students. The choreographers create original works and mount existing works on dancers who are chosen by audition. Artist-in-Residence (AIR) Workshops bring renowned dance artists from the profession to share their various areas of expertise with students of The Ailey School. They represent a range of aesthetics from masters like Alvin Ailey, Paul Taylor and Robert Battle, to more contemporary and emerging artists like Ron K. Brown, Ray Mercer, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater members Matthew Rushing and Kirven Douthit-Boyd. These workshops offer supplementary technique training, creative work, and the opportunity to learn and perform original and classical dance repertory. Students rehearse for 4-8 weeks and perform the works in the School's Ailey Citigroup Theater and in studio performances throughout the year and during the summer. AIR Workshops culminate in the School's Spring Concert held in the Ailey Citigroup Theater.

## **DANCE ACADEMICS - Certificate Program requirements**

### **Music for Dancers**

Any career in dance requires basic fluency in the language of music. Performers, choreographers, teachers, and dance scholars all need to be able to hear and analyze musical ideas, and to be able to communicate them to other dancers and musicians. This course emphasizes the basics of understanding music and movement, with an emphasis on rhythm. Students will build precise musical vocabulary through listening, writing (notation), and movement (physical embodiment). Throughout the course, dancers will be expected to demonstrate their knowledge with small choreographic projects based on specific musical parameters.

### **Dance History**

This course is an overview of the history of dance performance from the early 20th century to the present, explored via the works of dancers, choreographers, and teachers who brought about notable changes in the art form. This course is designed to help the student relate their own work to the development of the art and to encourage creative critical perception.

### **The Fundamentals of Musical Theatre**

This class offers the student an opportunity to explore the three elements required to be a musical theatre performer: singing, dancing and acting. All three of these skills are viewed through the lens of the student being the storyteller. The class is structured so that each student is constantly reminded that storytelling is the essential thread that will assist them in embodying their understanding more easily, whether singing, dancing or acting, or any combination of all three.

The class and instructor meet the student where they are, while encouraging the student to step out of their comfort zone and see what's possible. The evolution of the musical theatre artist is no different than that of the modern dancer. While a performance is the end goal, becoming a performing artist is an ongoing process and not a finished end goal in and of itself.

Experiential learning is the primary way to offer the student the best understanding. The goal of the course is to arrive at the second to last session at which the students as a group will share / perform a musical theatre number chosen from the canon of musical theater choreographed specifically for the class of students and each student will perform a solo song. The structure of this session is set up in the guise of a mock audition. This offers the student the opportunity to show up with how they've embodied their understanding of the elements. When the student completes the course, they will come away with a clearer understanding of the expectations of a musical theatre performer.

## **CREATIVE STUDIES - Certificate Program requirements**

### **Improvisation**

This course is structured to free expression, investigate form, and heighten concentration. Structured dance improvisational exercises are given to lead the student to simultaneously invent and perform movement without pre-planning. Each class includes a brief warm-up followed by many different and changing forms - group movement, solos, trios and contact improvisation which begin with duets. Emphasis is placed on the development in each student of a heightened sensitivity and conscientiousness about the creative impulse. Personal movement style and habits and the role of improvisation in both performance and the creative process are thoroughly explored.



## **Dance Composition I & II**

These courses capitalize on the skills garnered in improvisation class by carefully leading students into the process of composing short studies based on a variety of abstract themes. Very specific limitations provide the framework of the initial studies and students are encouraged to acknowledge personal impulse and style while exploring within this base. Later, emphasis is placed on the growth of content and context out of these abstract explorations and studies become more ambitious. Supportive group feedback is central to the development of every student's work. Students are required to present both a group and solo work as final projects at the end of the semester.

## **Repertory and Performance Workshop**

This course is designed to assist intermediate/advanced students in bridging the gap between classroom dancing and skilled stage performance. Student members perform as the Ailey Student Performance Group (ASPG) in as many as 15 annual performances in the tri-state area in diverse sites such as hospitals, community centers, elementary schools, colleges and universities, and at The Ailey School. This course develops the students' awareness and usage of space and their ability to pick up and execute quickly and accurately movement sequences and combinations. It refines musicality, phrasing, structure and composition. On a rotating basis, students also serve as dancers, choreographers, stage managers, technicians, and costumers throughout the course.

*February 23, 2025*