

THE EAST BAY MONTHLY

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DANCE



PETER DASILVA

Ailey Camp schedules a free graduation dance for camp participants.

Ailey Camp Offers Don't-Miss Dance

Without any doubt, Alvin Ailey was one of the giants of American dance and not just because he created the monumental *Revelations*, a masterpiece of music and dance that the company has performed almost nonstop since its creation in 1960. Much less known is Ailey as the pioneering thinker of finding in dance the communicative power that inspired him and has the potential of shaping many young lives, giving them a perspective some thought impossible.

Ailey Camp grew out of the choreographer's awareness that the community dance programs the company offered during its tours around the country were insufficient to offer a door

to the many children who yet had to find out that dance is not some elite performance practice, but, as the camp's values statement says, "dance is for everybody."

Ten communities around the country have established Ailey Camps for middle school youngsters that offer six-weeks immersion training not only in different dance genres but also in the life skills they will carry with them into the challenging high school years.

For the last 16 years, the Berkeley/Oakland Ailey Camp—the only one on a college campus—has hosted kids on full scholarship from Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, and Albany to learn ballet, tap, jazz,

modern, and African dance. In 2005, the Oakland-born SPULU became a very reluctant camper. He had been kicked out of school and would be allowed to return to middle school only if he attended the camp. He has now graduated from San Francisco State University and has been a counselor at the camp since 2012—today as a group leader supervisor.

A soft-spoken, articulate, young man, he remembers how he learned to use his body differently in the various dance genres he learned. He also learned that authority doesn't exist to push people down but rather to help them. He understands human development on the middle school level and knows about goal setting, persistence, conflict resolution.

The high point of the yearly Ailey Camp is a professionally choreographed "graduation" performance in Zellerbach, free to the public. This year the show is called ... *and they are us* ...

SPULU remembers standing on the large stage in 2005 and being a little nervous looking into the audience. "It was validating my voice, but it was also proving to my family that I wasn't the bad kid they had expected. They were sitting there in the front row and wildly applauding; it was something that I will never forget." Berkeley/Oakland Ailey Camp Berkeley, ... *and they are us* ..., 7 p.m. Aug. 3, free, Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley; free tickets, four per person, may be picked up at the box office.

—Rita Felciano