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**Ailey School Co-Director Melanie Person to Lead Landmark
Dance Residency in Partnership with The MAX**

Mississippi native will conduct master classes, auditions, and a live talk

LAUREL & MERIDIAN, Miss. (February 11, 2026) — In advance of Ailey II's performance at the MSU Riley Center in downtown Meridian on Thursday, February 12, 2026, the Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience (The MAX) announces a three-day residency featuring Melanie Person, Co-Director of the world-renowned Ailey School in New York City.

Spanning February 26-28, 2026, the residency serves as a homecoming for Person, whose prestigious career in ballet began at the age of six in Jackson, Mississippi. The residency will begin with a visit to Laurel Middle School on Thursday, February 26. Person will lead a master class for ballet students, offering them the rare opportunity to train under one of the industry's most respected instructors. In a show of regional collaboration, the Mississippi School of the Arts (MSA) dance department will travel from Brookhaven to participate in the class while representatives from the International Ballet Competition (IBC) in Jackson will travel to observe.

"Having Melanie Person in our studio is a dream come true," said Gabby Bass, Laurel Middle School Dance Teacher. "Her visit validates our students' hard work and shows them that the highest levels of the dance world are within their reach." Audarshia Lee-Flagg, Principal of Laurel Middle School, and Dr. Victor Hubbard, Assistant Superintendent, noted that the residency underscores the district's commitment to providing both world-class artistic and academic experiences to its students and teachers.

Following the Laurel visit, the residency will transition to Meridian for two days of intensive training and public events at The MAX:

Friday, February 27: Ballet Master Classes (10 am + 4 pm) — Advanced dancers interested in a professional track will receive high-level technical insights and artistic guidance to help them reach their next level of performance. Registration is required.

Saturday, February 28: A Conversation with Melanie Person (10 am) — The public is invited to hear Person share her journey from a young dancer in Jackson to the head of one of the world's premier dance schools. Registration is encouraged for this free event.

Saturday, February 28: Ailey Auditions (1 pm) — Intermediate-level and advanced dance students, college dance majors, and early-career professionals will get the chance to audition for The Ailey School's prestigious 2026 Summer Intensive in New York City. Registration is required.

"The MAX exists to celebrate Mississippi's arts and cultural legacy while nurturing future creatives," said Dr. Heather R. LaCoste, Ed.D., Education Director of The MAX. "We are proud to provide a path that leads from a local classroom or dance studio directly to one of the most prestigious classrooms in the world."

Registration for MAX events is available at msarts.org/events. Members of the media are invited to attend the Laurel Middle School master class on February 26 at 9 am for photo and interview opportunities. Please contact jeremy@msarts.org for more details about these opportunities.

About The MAX

The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience (The MAX) is an arts and cultural center in the heart of downtown Meridian that celebrates Mississippi's creative legacy through interactive exhibits, workshops, and live performances. The multipurpose facility contains a two-story Hall of Fame celebrating the state's groundbreaking artists like Walter Anderson, William Faulkner, Morgan Freeman, Jim Henson, B.B. King, Elvis Presley, and Leontyne Price to name a few, along with over 20,000 square feet of interactive exhibits, art studios, a recording studio, and performance spaces. Every visit to The MAX is a unique experience that leaves visitors feeling inspired and in awe of Mississippi's global impact on music, literature, art, and entertainment. Visit www.msarts.org to learn more.

About Alvin Ailey + The Ailey School

Alvin Ailey (1931–1989) was a visionary choreographer who founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1958 to celebrate the Black experience and American cultural heritage. The Ailey School is the official educational wing of the company, training over 3,500 students annually in New York City.

About Melanie Person

Melanie Person serves as the Co-Director of The Ailey School. A former member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ms. Person's journey began at age six in Jackson, Mississippi. She is a leading global voice in dance pedagogy, known for technical precision and soulful artistry.

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