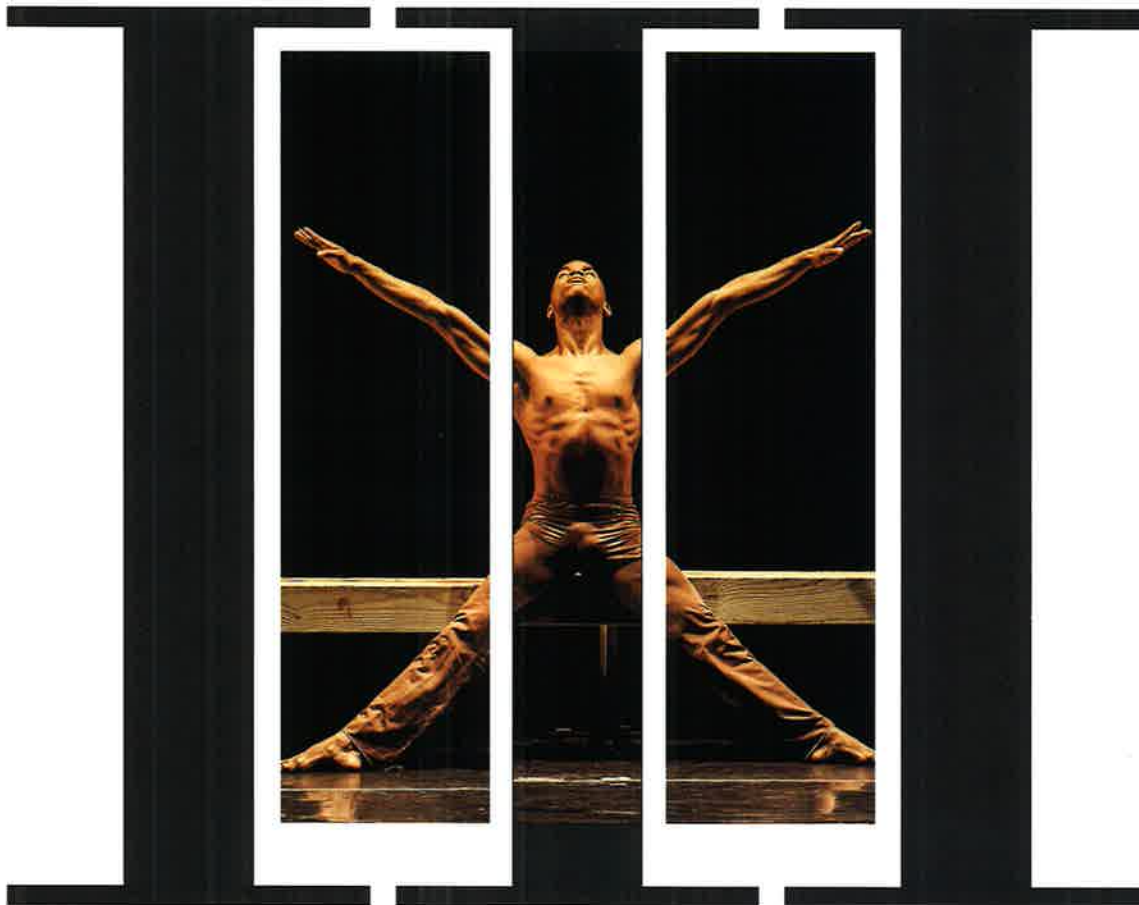


CLAUDE ALEXANDER



BY LINDEN WILSON. PORTRAIT SHAREN BRADFORD.

AGE: 31. **OCCUPATION:** DALLAS BLACK DANCE THEATRE DANCER. **TOOLS OF THE TRADE:** SPIRIT. AUTHENTICITY. AN OPEN MIND.

Nearly 25 years ago, in the predominantly black community of Prince George's County, Maryland, seven-year-old Claude Alexander III watched in wide-eyed wonder as a dancer named Robert Mason rehearsed for a play at the Evangel Cathedral church. "He was incredible," Alexander says. "I wanted to be just like him." Mason was the first male dancer he'd ever seen — and, unknowingly, the creative catalyst to Alexander's budding passion for artistic movement.

Now in his eighth season with the Dallas Black Dance Theatre, Alexander has the sculpted physique and poise developed through years of arduous training at Towson University, Maryland's Spirit Wings Dance Co., and both The Ailey School and Parsons

Dance in New York City. He arrived in Dallas to audition for DBDT after seeing the company perform in Philadelphia; the moment he was offered a position is his favorite memory of his career. "The company was strong, dynamic, talented, and full of individuals who looked like me," Alexander says. "It serves as a potential home to those who may not receive consideration for quality dance training or employment because of the color of their skin. It's important for people, younger children especially, to see positive images reflected on stage that they can relate to."

Since it opened in the mid-'70s, DBDT has remained a bastion of originality as the city's oldest dance company. Alexander's repertoire is stellar: He danced in the Dallas Theater Center's version of *The Wiz* and traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland, to perform in the 2012 Olympic Festival at Queen Elizabeth Theatre. For this month's *Spring Celebration* program (Friday – Sunday, May 18 – 20, at the Wyly Theater), Alexander flexes a different muscle. He's not only dancing but also choreographing — for the first time — a

contemporary modern piece titled "Face What's Facing You," which explores the notion of confronting life's challenges. "There are issues in my life I haven't dealt with," he says. "Because I'm not able to easily sit down and talk about these things, I choreographed a piece that touches on them."

Alexander directs the entire DBDT company in a humbling performance that lasts roughly 20 minutes but evokes a deeply introspective reality. Alexander won't reveal the music, only teasing that he wants to use strings and voices without meter so he can decide the pace of movement on his own. "The choreography is flowing out like water because I've decided not to judge myself," he says. "I wanted to feel free in my creative space."

He thrives on the awesome discovery that occurs while preparing for a show. For his debut choreographed piece, Alexander wants the audience to open up just as the dancers do. "I hope they feel the emotional charge in moments of the work that may influence them to express, even privately, how they truly feel or need to deal with 'self.'"