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Want to Build Insane Strength? Try Barre Workouts.

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Alvin Ailey's Michael Jackson, Jr. shares his barre routine to target your arm and leg muscles.

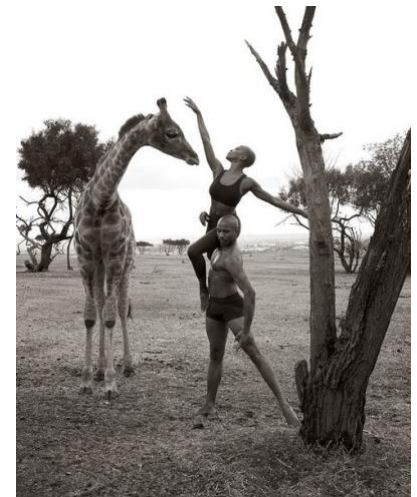
Every time Michael Jackson, Jr. steps on stage with his fellow Alvin Ailey company members, it feels like playtime when he was kid—pure fun. Not that you could tell from his physique. This is Jackson's seventh season dancing with the historically African-American company—you might recognize him from Alvin Ailey's promotional posters—and his toned dancer's body is a testament

to years of gym time, yoga poses, and repeatedly picking up 150-pound women. His workout is a regimen that merges traditional gym exercises three times a week (he's not an everyday gym guy) with ballet, modern dance, and yoga. A huge component of this is the barre.

"You will always see me doing push-ups on the barre," says Jackson. "I mix and match ballet barre with push-ups, where I stand a couple feet away from the bar, lean my body up, and fall towards bar. I do two and one arm push-ups."

Eating healthy also builds the strength, physical and otherwise, that you need for power through any activity. "Good food can do the trick to uplift your spirit as well as your instrument (your body). It relieves stress when you are healthy and feel strong. A healthy dancer is a happy dancer," says Jackson. During the Ailey season, his diet typically consists of a protein shake, eggs, and fruit for breakfast; blackened salmon, broccoli, and New Orleans-style rice for lunch; and turkey sausage meat pasta for dinner. But as a southern boy from New Orleans, he's no stranger to heavy, delicious food. "When it comes to diet, I tend to not judge myself on what I eat anymore—I have quite a broad taste," he says.

Alvin Ailey embarks on a 21-city North American tour on January 30 through May 13, which means four months of long flights, hotel changes, varying climates, and extended bus rides. To ward off the wear on his body, Jackson keeps plugging away at the barre to target his major muscle groups so that his performance on stage is as astonishing as ever. He walks us through the movements here.



Get His Workout:

You'll need access to a barre. Check to see if your gym has a barre studio, or buy an at-home barre. You could also use the back of a chair—just don't rely on it to support your full body weight.

Warm up with full-body rolls at the barre.

"While holding both hands onto the barre, I start with my feet flat together, and lift up one heel at a time and alternate. At the same time, I do slow, 360-degree head rolls," says Jackson. Then, add in *cambré*, which is where you hold onto the barre with two hands while bending backwards with the upper body. Do until you feel warm and loose.

Hit your core with an "insanity abs" exercise.



Sit on the floor in a regular sit-up position with knees bent, and head and shoulders off the floor. The exercise resembles a run, where you slide your heels back and forth on the floor with toes pointed up. Move your hands in front of your chest in circles at the same time as if you are washing someone's hair. Count to 50, then repeat 2 times.

Target your arms with one-armed push-ups at the barre.

Face the barre with legs positioned about 4 feet away and spaced a bit wider than shoulder length. One hand is on your hip and the other remains gripping the barre while you do push-ups. Count 20 each side.

Round out your arms with barre pull-ups.

Lie on the floor under the barre with knees up and feet planted on the ground. Grab the barre with your hands and pull yourself up until your chin kisses the barre. Repeat 10 to 20 times.

Tone your legs with grand plies, or standing squats.

Hold onto the barre with one hand, and stand with heels together and toes pointing out. Squat straight down so your back remains perpendicular to the floor and your butt is over your heels. Your heels should come up naturally as you lower. Squat down for four counts, and then rise up for four counts. Count 8 squats each side.

Slow down with a yoga break.

Find downward dog and then move into lunge stretches: Lift left leg towards the sky, then engage the core to kick it forward so your foot lands between your hands, with the knee bent. Return to downward dog. Alternate 8 times on each leg.