

Alvin Ailey Dancer Khalia Campbell Talks Faith, Skin Care, Self-Discovery

By: Leah Faye Cooper

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Few dance companies are more prestigious and competitive to get into than Manhattan-based Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. So, despite years of training and confidence in the skills she'd honed, Bronx native Khalia Campbell was stunned when she was asked to join in 2018. "I cried and cried," she says. "I was totally in shock, but I was elated and I was grateful. I think that's the best word to describe the feeling I had — grateful. One could say that it was destined to be." "I don't come from a musical background, but my dad was pretty musically inclined," Campbell says of her father, who died when she was 1. "He was a DJ and he also played the drums. He used to put his headsets around my mom's stomach when she was pregnant with me, so I just came out being able to listen to rhythm and move to it."



Moving to the extent that that she does — learning choreography, practicing multiple types of dance, performing onstage, and living in NYC, where walking is as fundamental as breathing — means that to Campbell, wellness isn't a modern, faddish luxury to indulge in; it's an essential part of her life. "To me, wellness is the quality of your health in all aspects — mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually," she says. "And I'm big on the spiritual. I'm a believer in God."

Ahead, Campbell shares how she takes care of her mind and body, including the vitamins she swears by, the morning routine that grounds her, and her favorite skin-care products.

On how she got into dance: I started dancing when I was about three years old, in the church. Then, when I was four, I started tap dance at the Ruth Williams studio in Harlem. As children do, I got bored and stopped for a while. But at nine, I picked tap back up and started doing ballet, African dance, gymnastics, hip-hop, everything. That's when I really got serious, and I just knew that this was what I wanted to do. This was all at Uptown Dance Academy, and then I went to LaGuardia for high school, which is known as the Fame school. I got waitlisted at [some schools I applied to] and didn't go to college. I started my first professional job when I was 18 in Aida, the musical, which was in Taiwan.

On how the COVID pandemic changed her approach to wellness: COVID made me more aware of how, mentally, I needed to do some self work. I realized that the way I was thinking about myself wasn't healthy, and I needed to discover my self worth. I didn't have dance anymore, and dance was my identity for so long. I had to figure out, Who is Khalia, the woman? Who is Khalia without dance? So there was a lot of mental and spiritual work that I had to embark on, because what I had to cover everything up — dance, being around family and friends, other distractions — I didn't have any more. I was forced to deal with my unhealthy habits physically, too, like what I was eating. I had to ask, What am I doing to make sure that I'm as healthy as I can be? The pandemic made me much more aware of how I was treating myself.

On how she starts her morning: The timing of when I wake up ranges. I'm trying to be more intentional and disciplined and consistent when it comes to my routine, but on a regular work day, I normally wake up around 7:30 or 8 a.m. The first thing I do is my quiet time, which is talking to God. I journal, and then I open up my Bible and pray. I shower, and choose my outfit based on what dance we're doing that day; sometimes it's balletic, sometimes it's something more urban. Afterward, I eat breakfast at home or get it on the way to the company. Breakfast is typically a smoothie. I love smoothies from Juice Generation — I usually get the strawberry-mango-pineapple and add ginger.

On her diet: During the pandemic I started eating meat again, which is crazy because I was pescaterian for two years. It was basically like emotional eating. I've gone back to not eating any chicken or beef or pork; I stick to salmon and sea bass fish. And I can't eat too much dairy because it creates a lot of mucus in my system, and my joints get very inflamed. I take vitamins, and during the pandemic I've been really serious about it. I'm big on vitamin C and zinc, and my mom just put me onto sea moss. It comes in vitamin form, and has all these sea nutrients that are good for your body. My two biggest

indulgences are chips and gelato. Like I said, I typically don't do dairy, but oh my goodness — Talenti Cookie Caramel Swirl — I could eat a whole pint in one sitting.

On how she moves: Working with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, it's not enough to just take class. I learned this the hard way. [Laughs.] Because of the strenuous work and wide range of dance styles that we do, cross-training is a big part of the company culture. At one point I was really into Pilates and yoga. I don't do it anymore because my training has changed, but I'll go on YouTubes and find exercise routines to help strengthen my core, and do those. We have an amazing physical therapy team and they give us exercises to do as well, personalized for our bodies and anything we may be struggling with.

On preventing injury: The toll that dance takes on you is high if you don't take care of your body. I have colleagues who have never had an injury in their life, and it's because they take care of their bodies. That consists of daily visits to the physical therapist to make sure that your body is aligned, cross-training, massages, and eating foods that give you energy. We dance so much that sometimes you just want to relax and not do anything, but your body is your instrument and you have to take care of it — you only have one. And everybody is different, you know? Being aware of what your body needs and likes is important. Write it down, talk about it with a doctor; I know some dancers who do allergy tests. These are all things that help you perform to the best of your ability.

On her nighttime routine: To be honest, I don't have one. What I typically do to wind down is just sit on the couch and watch Netflix on my laptop. [My bedtime] has been getting later and later. Right now it's around 11, which isn't the best. Again, I'm working on intentionality and discipline. [Laughs.]

On her favorite wellness practices: I would love to incorporate more massages into my routine — maybe once a week. Also, getting your nails and feet done is considered wellness, right? [Laughs.] I love manicures and pedicures.

On skincare: I love Origins. I use A Perfect World™ SPF 40 to moisturize my face during the day; it has white tea. At nighttime, I use the high-potency cream. I also have the daily face wash, the exfoliator, and a mask that I use once or twice a week. I'm so big on skin care. For toner, I typically use witch hazel in the morning and rose water at night. I like natural products.