COMPANY STORY

Ailey II is universally renowned for merging the spirit and energy of the country’s best early-career dance talent with the passion and artistry of today’s most outstanding choreographers.

Founded in 1974, the company embodies Alvin Ailey’s pioneering mission to establish an extended cultural community that provides dance performances, training, and community programs for all people.

Ailey II flourished into one of the most popular dance companies in the county under the leadership of Sylvia Waters, who was selected by Mr. Ailey to be its founding Artistic Director, serving in that role for the Company’s first 38 seasons. Trained at The Ailey School—and the daughter of the late Denise Jefferson, director of The Ailey School 1984-2010—Francesca Harper brings fresh perspectives to Mr. Ailey’s legacy during her inaugural season.

The company’s repertory has included works by dance masters Alvin Ailey, Talley Beatty, Donald Byrd, Ulysses Dove, George W. Faison, Lar Lubovitch, Judith Jamison and Ailey’s Artistic Director Robert Battle as well as works by rising choreographers such as Sidra Bell, Jae Man Joo, Carlos dos Santos, and Christopher L. Huggins. Ailey II’s 12 rising stars inspire audiences in dozens of cities across the globe.

WHAT CRITICS ARE SAYING

“The dancers in Ailey II are spectacular beings”
– The New York Times

“The dancers proved indefatigable, virtuosic and relentlessly sexy.”
– Los Angeles Times

“Some of the country’s best young dancers.”
– The Kansas City Star
COMMUNITY OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to Ailey II’s awe-inspiring performances, the company also offers three community outreach opportunities: the master class, the lecture/demonstration and the schooltime performance.

MASTER CLASS

Trained dancers take class with the young professionals of Ailey II and get a glimpse of their daily routine. One teacher and two demonstrators make it easy for participants to follow and ask questions in the 60-90 minute modern dance class. Master classes typically accommodate 25-30 students at the middle school level or older.

LECTURE/DEMONSTRATION

A mixture of narration, demonstration, participation, and Q & A session, the lecture/demonstration is great for students age 8 and older. Company members demonstrate techniques from popular repertory, speak about the company’s history and their personal experiences, and answer audience questions in this 45-60 minute session.

SCHOOLTIME PERFORMANCES

Young students and families experience a dynamic performance with full costumes, lighting and sound that is only one hour in length – perfect for the young audience member. Programming is adapted to be age-appropriate. These performances must be held on a theater stage.
Francesca Harper, Artistic Director

Francesca Harper began her professional dance career with Dance Theater of Harlem. She was a member of William Forsythe’s Ballett Frankfurt from 1991-1999 where she became a principal dancer in 1994. She has performed on Broadway in productions including Fosse, All Shook Up, The Color Purple, Sweet Charity, and Sophisticated Ladies, and was nominated for Best Actress in a Musical by Broadway.com for her role as Billie Holiday in Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar and Grill. Ms. Harper created her first play, 50 minutes with Harriet and Phillis, produced by Anna Deavere Smith, with her aunt, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Margo Jefferson, and Paul Miller, a.k.a DJ Spooky. In 2014, she debuted her critically acclaimed one-woman show, The Look of Feeling, as a writer, actor, dancer, and vocalist. She is also the writer, producer, composer, and narrator of the documentary film To Lillian (2021). Ms. Harper has choreographed works for companies including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, Dance Theater of Harlem, Hubbard Street II, and Tanz Graz, as well as The Francesca Harper Project, which she founded in 2005. Her television and film credits include appearances on Boardwalk Empire, Late Night with David Letterman, and The Oprah Winfrey Show. She served as ballet consultant for the motion picture Black Swan and was featured in Zinnias – The Life of Clementine Hunter, directed by Robert Wilson. In 2013, Ms. Harper received a Living History Award during Black History Month from Long Island University and the Innovation and Technology Award for her choreography for Fashion Week with designer Louis Vuitton. She also served as co-director and choreographer for the musical Rose’s War and as movement director for Tommy Hilfiger and Zendaya for their fashion show at the Apollo Theater in 2019. Ms. Harper was the creator and directorial consultant for 16 world premiere virtual films. Her latest works include a new creation for Wendy Whelan, Associate Artistic Director of New York City Ballet, and poet Marc Bamuthi Joseph. Currently, Ms. Harper is engaged as Executive Producer with Sony Pictures on a series in development and pursuing an MFA in performance creation at Goddard College.

Lakey Evans-Peña, Rehearsal Director

Lakey Evans-Peña is a performer, educator, movement director, community advocate, and artistic mentor. Presently she serves as the Rehearsal Director for Ailey II, the Ailey/Fordham Student Dancers, and as a master teacher of the Horton technique. Her teaching, rehearsing and coaching practice is centered in cultural relevance, artistic empowerment, and performance practice. Ms. Evans-Peña received her BFA from the University of the Arts and her MFA from Montclair State University. She was a scholarship recipient at The Ailey School and subsequently joined Ailey II where she performed principal roles in works by Alvin Ailey, Ronald K. Brown, and Eleo Pomare. She was a lead in Donald Byrd’s national tour of The Harlem Nutcracker and additionally performed Byrd’s choreography for the New York City Opera’s production of Carmina Burana. In 2009, she founded the Williamsburg Movement & Arts Center in Brooklyn, NY. As the Artistic and Executive Director, she developed school and community partnerships which enabled over three thousand students a year to explore dance through daytime residencies and afterschool programming. Ms. Evans-Peña has taught extensively throughout the U.S. and served as a visiting professor at Marymount Manhattan College, Montclair State University, AMDA, and as artist in residence at Hollins University.
Nicholas Begun (Brooklyn, NY) began his formal dance training at Ballet Tech in New York City. He attended Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts and received his degree from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in 2021. In 2018, Mr. Begun appeared in artist Nick Cave’s Park Avenue Armory installation “The Let Go,” with movement directed by Francesca Harper. He was also featured in the Holland Dance Festival in 2020. Mr. Begun has performed for two seasons in the Radio City Christmas Spectacular. This is his first season with Ailey II.

Meagan King (Brooklyn, NY) graduated magna cum laude from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program, receiving the Glorya Kaufman Scholarship. She has been featured in Dance Spirit magazine, the TODAY Show and at the Holland Dance Festival. Ms. King was a student at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. She was the 2019 and 2020 BLOCH Ailey Young Artist. She is also an alumna of the 2018 Contemporary Program at Jacob’s Pillow. Ms. King has choreographed for the Color Me Beautiful production in Virginia and LaGuardia High School’s 2021 senior graduation dance concert. This is her first season with Ailey II.

Elijah Lancaster (Bentonville, AR) was born in Port Au Prince, Haiti. He began his formal dance training at age seven at Aspire Dance in Arkansas. He later studied at The Ailey School where he graduated from the Certificate Program. Mr. Lancaster performed with the Francesca Harper Project, XY Dance Project, Pony Box Dance, and the Black Iris Project. He has also performed in Alvin Ailey’s Memoria during Ailey’s New York City Center season, and worked with choreographers including Travis Wall, Amy Hall Garner, Darrell Grand Moultrie, Andrea Miller, and Robert Battle. This is his second season with Ailey II.

Jamaris Mitchell (Syracuse, NY) began her dance training in her hometown at the age of five at the Center of Ballet and Dance Arts. She attended summer intensives at Hubbard Street Dance, as well as at The Ailey School where she also trained as a scholarship student. Ms. Mitchell has performed works by Matthew Rushing, Darrell Grand Moultrie, and Ray Mercer, and appeared in Alvin Ailey’s Memoria during Ailey’s 2016 New York City Center season. She was featured in the 2017 Vogue Collections video and appeared in the FX series POSE. This is Ms. Mitchell’s second season with Ailey II.

Shanice Chelsea Reyes (Kissimmee, FL) graduated from the Osceola County School for the Arts (OCSA). While attending OCSA, she also trained at Raskin Dance Studio. Ms. Reyes is a graduate of The Ailey School’s Certificate Program. During her time at The Ailey School, she appeared in the 2017 and 2019 Ailey Spirit Gala at Lincoln Center, Robert Battle’s Moonlight, Ronald K. Brown’s Four Corners, Alvin Ailey’s Flight Time restaged by Renee Robinson, and Alvin Ailey’s Memoria restaged by Ronni Favors during Ailey’s 2018 and 2019 New York City Center seasons. This is Ms. Reyes’s first season with Ailey II.

Hannah Alissa Richardson (Toronto, ON, Canada) graduated with honors from The Ailey School Certificate Program. She has traveled coast to coast participating in workshops and competitions taking home top overall awards and scholarships. Ms. Richardson has performed works by choreographers including Ray Mercer, Bradley Sheler, Kirven Douthit-Boyd, Earl Mosley, William Forsythe, and Robert Battle. She has been a featured dancer in festivals such as Bard Summerscape and the Holland Dance Festival. Some of her film and television credits include Orion Pictures’ Every Day and Disney Channel’s Backstage. Ms. Richardson is also a guest artist for Ronald K. Brown’s Evidence, A Dance Company. This is her first season with Ailey II.

Photos by Nir Arieli
Jeffrey Robert Robinson III (Minneapolis, MN) began his dance training at Main Street School Performing Arts in his hometown at age 16 and received a BFA in dance from the University of Minnesota. He continued his training at The Ailey School as a scholarship student and has performed works by Bill T. Jones, Arnie Zane, Stephen Petronio, Donald Byrd, Ray Mercer, and Alvin Ailey. This is Mr. Robinson’s second season with Ailey II.

Amar Smalls (Brooklyn, NY) began his dance training at The Abrons Arts Center Henry Street Settlement in New York City. In 2017, he graduated from Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. Mr. Smalls was a scholarship and Independent Study student at The Ailey School. He also trained at Harlem School of the Arts and Steps on Broadway. He has worked with choreographers including Ray Mercer, Daniel Catanach, Aubrey Lynch, Christopher Huggins, and Darrell Grand Moultrie. At age 16, Mr. Smalls started Brokeland, an art collective where artists create music, film, and paintings. This is his second season with Ailey II.

Christopher Taylor (Newark, NJ) is a graduate of Arts High School. He began his dance training at age 11 in The Ailey School Junior Division. He also attended AlleyCamp Newark’s summer program, and later studied as a scholarship student in The Ailey School Professional Division. Mr. Taylor has performed at the Apollo Theater, Lincoln Center, and in Ailey’s New York City Center galas. This is his first season with Ailey II.

Brena Thomas (Chicago, IL) began dancing at the Sammy Dyer Dance Theatre in 2005 and started her formal training at Chicago High School for the Arts under the direction of Lisa Johnson Willingham. After graduating from “Chi-Arts,” she received a scholarship to attend Alonzo King Lines Ballet and Ballet Austin. Ms. Thomas also trained as a scholarship student at Dance Theatre of Harlem and The Ailey School. She has performed works by Gregory Dawson, Aubrey Lynch, Ray Mercer, Brice Mousset, Leyland Simmons, and Bradley Shelver, and she was a guest artist for South Chicago Dance Theatre. Ms. Thomas also appeared in the FX hit series POSE. This is her second season with Ailey II.

Travon M. Williams (Chicago, IL) began his formal dance training in the Joffrey Community Engagement program under Pierre Lockett. He graduated from Chicago High School for the Arts and received scholarships to attend the Chicago MultiCultural Dance Center, Debbie Allen School of Dance, Ballet Chicago, Ballet Austin, and Deeply Rooted. Mr. Williams is also a graduate of The Ailey School Certificate Program. He has performed works by Darrell Grand Moultrie, Amy Hall, Pierre Lockett, Kevin Iega, Yusha-Marie Sorzano, and Omar Roman de Jesus. Most recently, Mr. Williams appeared on the HBO Max series, Legendary. This is his first season with Ailey II.

Rachel Yoo (Bridgewater, NJ) is a graduate of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program. She began her classical dance training at the New Jersey School of Ballet. Ms. Yoo attended Somerset County Vocational & Technical High School where she studied dance under the direction of Sheila Sullivan. She trained at Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Parsons Dance, and Peridance Blueprint. She has performed works by Alvin Ailey, Robert Battle, William Forsythe, Norbert De La Cruz III, Gabrielle Lamb, and Chuck Wilt, and has danced with Barkin/Selissen Project and McKoy Dance Project. This is Ms. Yoo’s first season with Ailey II.
WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING ABOUT

“The dancers in Ailey II are spectacular beings.”
   The New York Times

“Highbrow/Brilliant.”
   New York magazine

“Ailey II audiences get to see tomorrow’s stars today.”
   New York Amsterdam News

“Second to none.”
   Dance Magazine

“Ailey II continues the legacy of founder Alvin Ailey, delivering pristine performances with dynamic movement and dazzling technique.”
   Atlanta Journal-Constitution

“Young, gifted, talented and thrilling”
   Amsterdam News

“The dancers...have power and maturity.”
   New York Post

“The twelve members of Ailey II...are all superb young dancers, with powerful jumps, leg extensions that never quit, and innate theatricality...”
   The Village Voice

“The performers’ technique and performance quality continues to be some of the best in the country.”
   The Examiner

“...the dancers of Ailey II simply never disappoint. What can’t the dancers of Ailey II do? The answer: They can do no wrong.”
   New York Amsterdam News

“...they are, in fact, far from human in their immense capability.”
   The Dance Enthusiast

“...there’s nothing like an evening spent with Ailey II... there were promising, even sparkling performances.”
   The New York Times
PUBLICITY HIGHLIGHTS
The Gallo Center for the Arts is hosting Ailey II, one of the most prestigious dance companies in the United States. This is Ailey II’s first appearance at the Center since February 2019!
Francesca Harper is Changing the Trajectory of The Ailey II Company New York

By: Audrey J Bernard
February 17, 2022

Wednesday’s woman

Francesca Harper is changing the trajectory of The Ailey II Company New York

Francesca Harper, internationally renowned performer, choreographer, and artistic director, has changed the trajectory of The Ailey II Company New York. Through her leadership and vision, Harper has transformed the organization and its dancers, resulting in a significant change for the company.

Harper, the new artistic director and executive director, is working to strengthen the company by focusing on its core values and mission. She plans to expand the company’s reach and impact by increasing its visibility and engagement with audiences worldwide.

Harper’s experiences and background have prepared her well for her new role. Previously, she served as the artistic director of The Juilliard School’s Julliard Jazz Ensemble and the director of the Ailey/Capone Dance Project. She also served as the artistic director of The Joyce Theater.

Harper’s leadership has already resulted in several notable achievements for The Ailey II Company. Under her guidance, the company has expanded its national touring schedule and has developed new partnerships with community organizations and schools. Harper’s vision for the company is to create a space where dancers can thrive and express themselves.

In conclusion, Francesca Harper’s leadership represents a significant change for The Ailey II Company New York. Her dedication to the organization and her commitment to its mission have already resulted in positive changes for the company and its dancers. With her leadership, The Ailey II Company is poised to continue its growth and success.

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[The text continues discussing Harper’s achievements and contributions to The Ailey II Company, highlighting her impact on the company's trajectory and the broader dance community.]

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[The text concludes with a summary of Harper's leadership, emphasizing her impact on the Ailey II Company and the broader dance community.]

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[The text concludes with a note about Harper's future plans and her dedication to the Ailey II Company, emphasizing her commitment to the organization and the dancers.]

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[The text concludes with a closing statement, thanking Harper for her leadership and contributions to The Ailey II Company.]
Ailey II brings ‘exuberance’ to dance

By: Eva Thomas
February 10, 2022 (Online 2/9/22)

The Ailey II dance company brings new work and high energy to the Palm on Monday at 6 p.m. (Photo courtesy of Nir Arieli)

Ailey II brings ‘exuberance’ to dance

Valentine’s Day performance at the Palm to feature new work

By EVA THOMAS
Staff Reporter

This Valentine's Day the world-renowned Ailey II is coming back for their third performance in Telluride. Ailey II is the second company from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York City. The company consists of 12 young dancers from across North America. The performance will be held on Feb. 14 at the Palm Theatre.

“Ailey II is a lovely, energetic dance company, and their exuberance is evident in every piece,” said managing director of Palm Arts Kathy Jepson.

The two-hour performance is made up of five separate pieces, including Psukhe (2019), Searchlight (2021), Takademe (1999), Enemy in the Figure (1989), and Freedom Series.

Ailey II, first known as the “Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble,” was created in 1974 to bridge the professional dance world and The Ailey School. Alvin Ailey started the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1958. The company included Ailey and a group of young black modern dancers. Ailey was a dancer, choreographer, and activist.

According to AlvinAiley.org, “he founded Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to carry out his vision of a company dedicated to enriching the American modern dance heritage and preserving the uniqueness of the African-American cultural experience.”

Ailey then founded what is now known as the Ailey School in 1969.

Artistic director Francesca Harper will lead Monday’s performance. Hired in September 2021, this will be Harper’s first season as Ailey II’s artistic director. A multi-disciplinary artist, choreographer, director, and performer, Harper hopes to bring Ailey’s legacy and vision into the performance.

“Ailey II’s mission lies in generating space for human narratives expressed through the strength, grace, and versatility of the next generation of gifted young dancers. As exemplified in this year’s diverse repertory, I am looking forward to bringing in new choreographic voices and programming works that further an ongoing cultural dialogue and contribute to social transformation,” said Harper in a Feb. 2 press release from Palm Arts.

See DANCE, Page 7
Francesca Harper named artistic director of Ailey II
By: Zita Allen
September 30, 2021

Ask Francesca Harper how she felt when Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Artistic Director Robert Battle announced her appointment as artistic director of Ailey II, that internationally renowned AAADT’s acclaimed troupe of young talented dancers and she gushes with excitement declaring, “It’s kind of surreal.” Yet, in many ways the appointment seems a natural step in a rather remarkable career, as well as a promising beginning of a critically acclaimed dance company’s next chapter, and last but not least, as a perfect example of the circle of life.

Harper’s appointment opens the next chapter of Ailey II as it prepares for a much-anticipated return to live performances with the kickoff of its 2021-2022 season, beginning in December with participation in the AAADT’s annual New York City Center season. The Ailey II dancers will join the AAADT for the performance of Ailey’s classic “Memoria,” the tribute to Ailey colleague, dancer and master teacher Joyce Trisler. Then without skipping a beat Ailey II kicks off a busy 2022 with its own New York season March 23-April 3 at the Ailey Citigroup Theater along with a U.S. Tour. (THE TOUR IS BEFORE AND AFTER THE U.S. SEASON)

During a recent interview, Harper’s enthusiasm clearly communicated the energy of an artist ready to hit the ground running a quality the AAADT search committee must have found compelling after what AAADT Artistic Director Robert Battle said was, “an exhaustive international search done by a firm. We wanted to make sure we had a wide variety of people who we may not have thought of. There were so many great candidates but at the end of the day, we made the right choice for the right time. She came equipped.”

In fact, so many aspects of Harper’s biography makes this appointment feel like a homecoming. In fact, Battle mentioned that the multi-talented Harper not only trained at the Ailey School before embarking on an extraordinarily successful professional career in dance, but regularly returned to teach and choreograph. What’s more, in addition to being “charismatic, caring and utterly brilliant,” Battle noted, “She knew Mr. Ailey and drew inspiration as a dancer from Ms. Jamison. And her vision for Ailey II will not only bring fresh perspectives to Mr. Ailey’s legacy, but also bring new voices to the stage and propel the Company forward. She is the perfect choice to lead Ailey II.”

Ailey II is an artistically important part of the Ailey vision, says former Ailey dancer Sylvia Waters who served as that company’s first artistic director for 38 years after Mr. Ailey entrusted her with this smaller troupe designed to serve, among other things, as “a performance vehicle for the gifted and talented dancers of the Ailey School to teach them what it was to be in a company.” It’s done such a successful job of training future dancers that many Ailey II dancers have gone on to join the main company, AAADT, and many choreographers whose works were presented by the second company have gone on to create dances on the first company.

Battle’s excitement about the choice of Francesca Harper to head this important artistic entity is underscored by a resume that he and Bennett Rink, executive director of the Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, found impressive to say the least. The multi-talented, multi-discipline Harper has had an impressive career as a dancer, choreographer, singer, actor, director, producer and teacher both in America and in Europe. She grew up surrounded by dance greats studying at the Ailey School, becoming a soloist with the Dance Theatre of Harlem under the direction of Arthur Mitchell, choreographed works for both of the Ailey professional companies and DTH, Hubbard Street II, and La Bale Da Cidade, among others, as well as works commissioned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and her own The Francesca Harper Project; has been a principal dancer with Ballet Frankfurt, under choreographer William Forsythe, and a featured performer in Broadway shows; has served as a consultant for major film and stage productions; and has extensive teaching experience, with posts at Juilliard, New York University, Barnard, and The Ailey School’s joint BFA program with Fordham University. She is the daughter of the late Denise Jefferson, who directed The Ailey School from 1984 to 2010.
It is this last point, Harper says, that makes her appointment of Ailey II feel like life coming full circle.

“My mother, Denise Jefferson, was always my inspiration and mentor for teaching and giving back to the community. Through her work at The Ailey School she changed the landscape for young aspiring dance artists, including me, and was an unfailing example of courage and compassion. I feel I grew up at The Ailey School, and now, having performed and choreographed around the world, it is profoundly moving to me to come home, accepting the great privilege of leading Ailey II.”

Describing her reaction upon learning of her appointment, Harper says, “It just felt like everything was in alignment. “The moment that everything fell into place there was something that I was embodying,” she said recalling her as a little girl visiting her mother in her own office as head of The Ailey School. Fast forward to today, Harper said, “I thought about the moment that I’m there working in the building again and my daughter comes in to hang out with me and sees my mother’s picture on the 2nd floor and then I think about all we’ve been through and the movement we’ve all been through,” Harper says referring to both her family’s involvement in the early Civil Rights Movement and the current the Black Lives Matter movement and the heightened awareness of the need for diversity, equity and inclusion, for Blacks and for women, and the Ailey organization’s own legacy of art reflective of the cares and concerns of the world we inhabit. Harper says of her new appointment, “It feels so much bigger than me.”

Ms. Harper and the Ailey organization are also announced the appointment of Lakey Evans-Peña as rehearsal director of the company. A former member of Ailey II herself, Ms. Evans-Peña has been serving as a teacher and advisor for The Ailey School and will continue in that role while taking up her new responsibilities with Ailey II.

Renowned for merging the spirit and energy of the country’s best young dance talent with the passion and creative vision of today’s most outstanding emerging choreographers, Ailey II was founded in 1974 as the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble. Since then, Ailey II has flourished into one of the most popular modern dance companies, combining a rigorous touring schedule with extensive community outreach programs, a reputation that will only be enhanced by Harper’s appointment.
From Summer Intensive to Dream Job

By: Haley Hilton
Winter 2020 Issue

It's every young dancer's fantasy: Attend a summer intensive, dazzle the artistic staff with your flawless technique, land a company contract, and grand-jeté into the sunset.

If only it were that simple, right? But while the intensive-to-company path isn't all that well traveled, it does exist. You may need to trade the words "company contract" for "second-company contract," "apprenticeship," or even "traineeship." At the end of the day, though, summer intensives are a great first step on the path toward the job of your dreams. They're a place to improve your dancing, get the feel of a company, and introduce yourself to the directors who could potentially hire you.

We caught up with six pros who followed the summer-intensive-to-dream-job route to get the inside scoop on how to give yourself a fighting chance at that coveted end-of-summer offer.

For Jamaries Mitchell, who's in her first season with Alley II, attending the company's summer intensive made all the difference. After participating in the program for multiple summers, she was awarded an apprenticeship with Alley II in 2018, and one year later, she officially joined the second company. "When I found out I got it, I wanted to scream, and cry, and yell, and laugh all at the same time," she says. "After all these years of dreaming, I finally did it."

On knowing Alley II was the place for her: "When I was 6 years old, Alley II artistic director Troy Powell did a master class in Syracuse, NY. It was my introduction to modern technique, and I ate it up. Once I saw the company dance in person, it was hard for me to think about anything else. I begged my mother constantly until I was old enough to attend the summer intensive. I came hoping it would eventually lead me to a contract—I think everyone at the summer program feels that way—and it worked."

On giving herself the best possible shot at a contract: "First and foremost, I followed the rules. I went to class, I was attentive, and I soaked up all the knowledge I could from my teachers. I also took advantage of the program advisor assigned to me during the experience. I talked with them about my goals, and they gave me advice for how to make them happen. They taught me how to present myself, how to work with choreographers, how to audition—and I listened."

Her advice for anyone hoping to follow in her footsteps: "Make friends. The program is very demanding, just as the company is demanding. The friendships you make will get you through it. They're your support system, and will be a big part of your eventual success."