



Performance Prep

February 25, 2011



Fana Tesfagiorgis backstage before *Splendid Isolation II*.
Photo by Elizabeth Washington

We arrived in Glasgow, Scotland on Saturday and had a couple days to enjoy the city. It's beautiful out here, and I can't explain how fortunate I am to experience all of the sites, shopping, diversity and different accents :)

After adjusting to the city and time zone, we prepared for our first UK performance at the King's Theatre! We have performed all of these pieces so many times before, so it shouldn't take much preparation, right?

Wrong. Every artist at every level undergoes a lot of preparation before a performance. Aside from all of the physical stuff (warming up, getting into makeup and costumes, etc.) there are a number of required internal steps that are very personal to each dancer. Here are a few of my personal priorities before every performance.

Step One: Refining the choreography. This step is never finished. I have yet to rehearse or perform a piece of choreography to the point of perfection. I know that sounds critical, but it keeps me pushing harder to know that there's always more to work on technically. I like to mentally go through each piece before the show and physically try all the steps that are most challenging. On a raked stage like King's, this was especially important since your alignment has to adjust constantly.

Being technically perfect isn't the only goal, nor is it why I dance. The beautiful challenge of being an artist is learning how to tap into different sides of oneself to share who you are with the audience. This brings me to step two: getting into character.

Step Two: Get into character. Sometimes I'll put on a character like a mask. Like an actor, I'll imagine her story line throughout the piece—who she is, how she feels—and interact with others on stage as she would. I'll even try to do my makeup in a way that reflects that character. All of these thoughts affect my energy, dynamics and emotions in a different way every show.

Other times (most of the time), the character is myself, my imagination mixed with different experiences that I've been through allow me to express whatever emotions a piece calls for.

In our program in Glasgow, Jessica Lang's *Splendid Isolation II* (excerpt) is perhaps the most emotionally challenging piece for me. Being a solo, there's a lot of responsibility on one person to set the tone for the entire stage. That said, I know that whatever I'm expressing has to come from a real place. With all of the lavish port de bras and torso movements, it pairs well with thoughts of longing, nostalgia and loneliness. I tend to think of my late grandfather, or Denise Jefferson, who was The Ailey School director (whom many of us call Ms. J), or others that I've been close to and have lost in some way. Whether it be specific memories of my times with them or abstract feelings of loss surrounding them, my thoughts and sometimes prayers are sent their way as I move.



The ladies of Ailey II doing their hair and makeup. Photo by Fana Tesfagiorgis

Step Three: Pray. I won't lie, I'm guilty of doing the whole "God please let me nail this pirouette tonight" thing, but my main hope every night is to have an impact on someone. When I feel drained physically, emotionally and spiritually, it tells me that the audience not only received a performance, but in a sense a part of me. The only thing that feels better than that moment is when I'm holding hands with eleven more people after an encore of *Revelations*, knowing that they all feel just as happily drained as I do. As tired and sore as we all know we'll be later, it's never a

waste knowing that someone in the audience needed to receive exactly what we could give. My prayers have been answered every time. I look forward to giving even more in our next stop.



Drummers playing on the street in Glasgow.
Photo by Fana Tesfagiorgis



Overlooking the River Clyde.
Photo by Fana Tesfagiorgis



Ailey II's Slim Mello, Solomon Dumas and Collin Heyward shopping in Glasgow. Photo by Fana Tesfagiorgis



Glasgow City Center.
Photo by Fana Tesfagiorgis