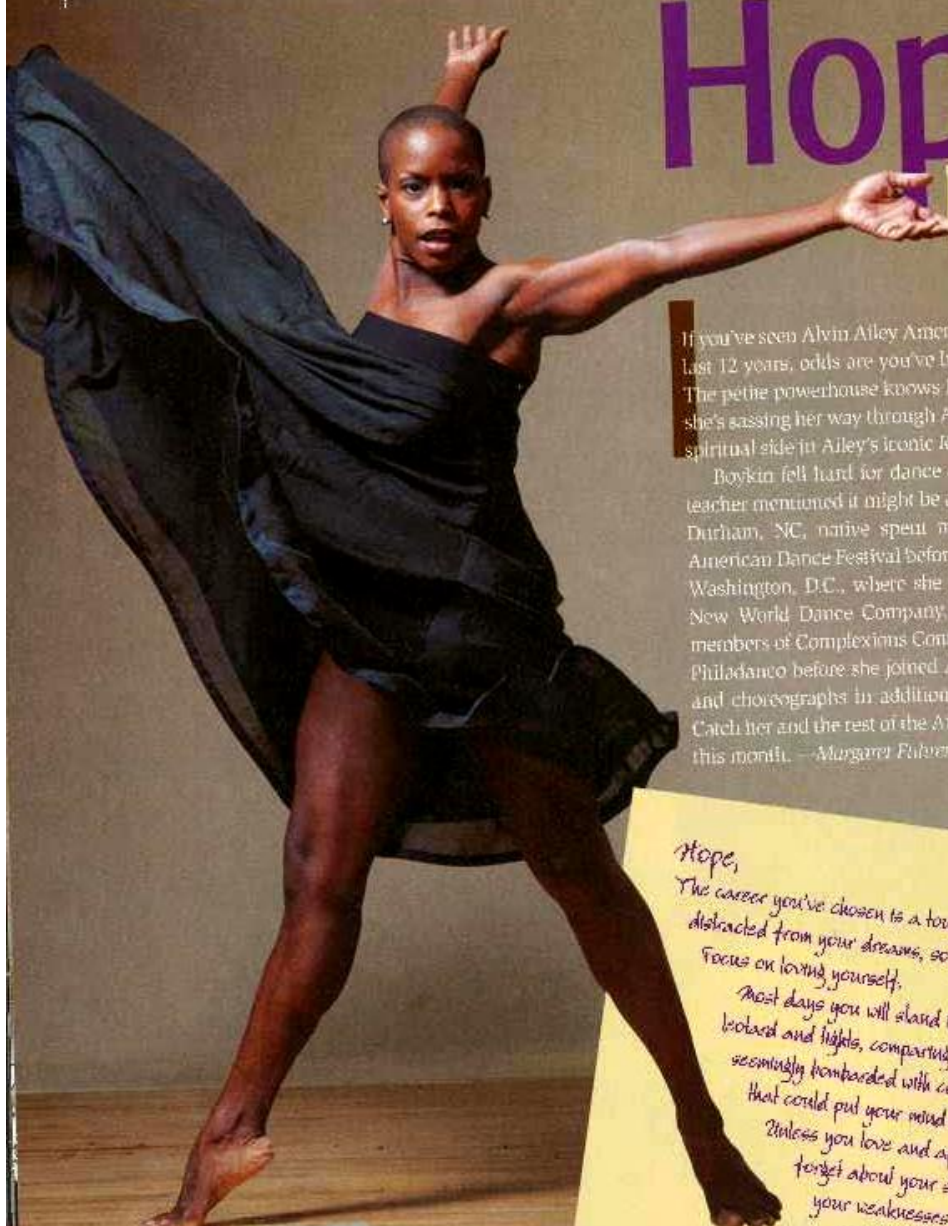


LETTER TO MY TEENAGE SELF dancer to dancer

Hope Boykin



If you've seen Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform in the last 12 years, odds are you've been mesmerized by Hope Boykin. The petite powerhouse knows how to command a stage, whether she's sassing her way through Ailey's *Blues Suite* or channeling her spiritual side in Ailey's iconic *Revelations*.

Boykin fell hard for dance as a youngster, after a gymnastics teacher mentioned it might be a good addition to her training. The Durham, NC, native spent multiple summers studying at the American Dance Festival before enrolling at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where she performed with Lloyd Whitmore's New World Dance Company. Boykin was one of the founding members of Complexions Contemporary Ballet and a dancer with Philadelphia before she joined AAADT in 2000. Today she teaches and choreographs in addition to performing with the company. Catch her and the rest of the Ailey dancers at New York City Center this month. —Margarita Fuhrer



Boykin as a student

Hope,

The career you've chosen is a tough one, and you can be easily distracted from your dreams, so please take this piece of advice: Focus on loving yourself.

Most days you will stand in front of a mirror, half dressed in a leotard and tights, comparing yourself to the dancer next to you, seemingly bombarded with corrections from your teachers. All of that could put your mind and spirit in an uncomfortable place. Unless you love and appreciate yourself, it will be easy to forget about your strengths as you are made aware of your weaknesses.

Love what you have been given. Your body is a temple—not to be worshipped, but to be used to give thanks for its abilities. You will have many chances to share your talents. Somewhere, someone is using you as an example. Lastly, loving yourself will teach you how important it is to take care of your body. You only have one! Strengthen it, and feed it wholesome foods that protect, nourish and give it energy. This will allow you to look as good as you feel. Trust me: I learned these things late, but I thank the Lord everyday for all that I have been taught and have experienced. Always give thanks. I love you.