

She Really Knows Her Numbers

By SIOBHAN BURKE

Not many dancers spend their days dashing between rehearsal and multivariable calculus class. But that was college for Jacquelin Harris, one of the newest members of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

"At freshman orientation, I raised my hand and said, 'I'd like to double major in engineering and math,'" Ms. Harris recalled. "And they were like, 'That's probably not going to happen.'" As a student in the rigorous B.F.A. program offered by Fordham University and the Ailey School, Ms. Harris would also be dancing for about seven hours a day. She settled for one major (math) to accommodate all that studio time and, come senior year, a position with Ailey's junior company, Ailey II.

Ms. Harris, 22, grew up in Charlotte, N.C., taking classes at her local competition studio. Though most of her peers stopped dancing after high school, her teacher, Denise Britz-Clarke, encouraged her to continue. Since joining Ailey II and, last summer, advancing into the main company, she has lightened her academic load but hasn't slowed down. With her uncommon blend of equanimity and drive, she has performed more featured parts than usual for a first-year company member, in works including Alvin Ailey's "Pas de Duke" and Christopher Wheeldon's "After the Rain."

If Ms. Harris is at all daunted by the pressures of her new job, it doesn't show. Between rehearsals for Ailey's Lincoln Center season, which wraps up this weekend, she talked about her first year of full-fledged company life. These are excerpts from the conversation.

Q. How did you find out you'd been promoted to the main company?

A. It was a complete shock. At the audition, I was just having a good time. We had to learn the choreography in 10 minutes, so we were all fumbling through it together. They asked me and two other girls to stay, then they looked at me and were like: "Welcome to the com-



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pany. When can you start working?" My jaw dropped. I was just staring. I know I looked crazy. I couldn't wrap my head around it!

What's been most challenging about the first year?

Probably the workload. We're on the road for six to eight months out of the year, and we're dancing a lot, which is a blessing, but it's taxing on the body. You have to find the right balance of rest and hard work.

You're performing "After the Rain" this weekend. What's that like?

It's nice to move slow. It's so different from a lot of our other rep. You can just allow your body to be as languid as the music. But you really have to center yourself. Right before the curtain goes up, the stage manager asks everyone to clear the stage so you and your partner can have a moment to yourselves. That really helps.

It must be tricky switching between styles.

It is. But that's what's most fun about this company. In any performance, you could go from something totally jazzy to African to hip-hop, back to "Revelations," classical modern. It keeps you on your toes.

Does your math background help you with dancing?

Definitely. Especially with this season's new Robert Battle piece, "No Longer Silent." It's all about counts and rhythms, very number-heavy. This part is in fours, then it turns to threes, then sixes and eights. I like to think about things logically. Like, if I want to do four pirouettes, I have to spot my head fast enough to get around four times in the amount of time I can stay on relevé. It's fun to make connections between science and dance. It makes me a little bit of a nerd, but that's O.K.

Are you finished with school?

I need one or two more credits to finish my degree in mathematics, so hopefully soon I'll get to go back. I'll do something fun, maybe statistics.