

whydance

Jacqueline Green

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater dancer

As a Black girl from the inner city of Baltimore, I hadn't known anything about the codified world of dance growing up. Ballet was something I had only seen on TV—and who I saw in it never looked like me. I never thought that would be my future.

My first introduction to dance was at my audition for the Baltimore School for the Arts, and from there a love bloomed. It didn't happen on the first day; it grew gradually, up until that one class where I was finally able to successfully execute a combination that we had been working on for a month—something that, at first, I didn't fully believe I could accomplish. The recognition came from my teacher, but the real reward was for myself. That confidence brought about a self-awakening. Dance made me believe that I could achieve anything.

Fast-forward a year, and I met someone who turned what I thought about the world of dance upside down: Linda-Denise Fisher-Harrell. At that time, she was a principal dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. After seeing her, I made a mental checklist: Black girl from Baltimore. Check. Performing in front of thousands of people around the world. Check. Getting paid to dance. Check. People accepting and being inspired by her artistry. Check. There were no more excuses for me to not take this dance thing seriously.

Once I made up my mind that it was possible to have a professional relationship with dance, my life changed. Dance taught me so much: Respect for my body, commitment, freedom of self, a strong work ethic, self-reflection. It taught me to love myself not “flaws and all,” but completely and uniquely for who I am. There is only one me, my story is different, and in this world I can be rewarded for it. I am a beautiful, Black girl from Baltimore and also a principal dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Representation matters. ■

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Green in
Alvin Ailey's *Cry*