



### 3 Brooklyn Dancers Take to the Stage as Part of Prestigious Ailey II Dance Company

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When Meagan King found out she would be dancing alongside the other members of prestigious dance company [Ailey II](#), she says it was like a dream being fulfilled.

As a middle school student in Brooklyn, she was first inspired to get into dance when she saw a performance by Ailey II — an offshoot of [Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater](#) — on YouTube.



"I knew that was a path for me then, so to finally realize it for myself and step into that power and ignite this new journey is super special for me," she told *BK Reader*.

King will be one of 12 dancers taking to the stage as part of the Ailey II dance company — and one of three that hail from Brooklyn — when the company returns to the stage March 23 for a two-week season. The company, founded in 1958 by Alvin Ailey, embodies Ailey's mission to establish an extended cultural community that provides dance performances, training and community programs for all people, the organization says.



After a pandemic-induced hiatus, the company will be returning to Ailey Citigroup Theater for the two-week run ending April 3 with multiple programs led by new Artistic Director Francesca Harper.

For King, the opportunity to dance with the company and under Harper's guidance gives her the freedom "to dive into who you are, and showcase who you are unapologetically."



"The past year, especially with the pandemic, has been an eye opening experience for me to realize that I'm not a product of an institution, I'm an individual artist who has much to offer this institution," she says, adding, "I realized I had so many gems within me that I can share for the greater good as opposed to making it that I'm just a dancer within this company I'm so happy to be a part of, but I have so much to offer."

It will be King's first season with the company, along with fellow Brooklynite, Nicholas Begun. Both King and Begun attended the LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts and are alumni of the Ailey/Fordham BFA program.



Begun, who says dancing for Ailey II has been a long-held goal, is coming into the new season after a tumultuous two years for the arts community, which he says have definitely affected his outlook on the artform. "Just by the nature of the isolation we all experienced throughout the quarantine, I feel like it was a moment to really dive inwards and do some reflection and see how that influenced my movement," Begun says. He says the period of social and political upheaval also prompted him to think more about art as a movement for change, and "how the stories we tell on stage influence our communities and people around us, using

art for empowerment."

"I feel like the social discourse we've had over the past two years and the ways that culture has been shifting has definitely influenced how I see dance and dance's role in that. "I'm inspired to keep moving and keep digging and working with people I admire and respect."

Begun will be dancing alongside Flatbush local Amar Smalls, for whom it will be the second season with Ailey II.

Smalls, a self-described “late bloomer” for starting dance at 13, says the past couple of years have really put into perspective for him how important theater is for its audiences. “There was a lot going on at once and theater is a place to escape that,” he says, adding “It makes me want to dance harder on stage and bring more of a light heartfelt feeling to let people escape that reality.” That feeling he gets while being on-stage? “Like I’m being shocked by eight million watts of electricity, my adrenaline is like on ten all the time.

“It’s exciting, it feels like you’re a superhero, otherworldly or something.” Smalls says he was first drawn to dance by the athleticism of it, and the feeling of flying through the air had him hooked.

Mixing the culture of Brooklyn with his ballet training gave him “a sort of rugged style, it’s a huge juxtaposition,” he says, adding an ultimate goal of his as a dancer is to make concert dance more mainstream for kids in the neighborhoods he grew up in.

“It was kind of hard because coming from here you only have two paths that they want you to go on if your Black and in the arts, you know like ‘I wanna be a basketball player or a rapper.’ “Going to ballet class every day was not normal at all, but it fueled me because I was the only person that was doing it and I’ve always wanted to be an outlier and not blend in.”

For more information on show times and tickets for Ailey II, [click here](#).