

Elite Dance Company Star Gets a Late Start Thanks to Mother's Persistence

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NEW YORK (CBS New York) — Many top dancers with elite dance companies start training when they're very young — but that's not always the case. Solomon Dumas — a rising star at the Alvin Ailey Company — started late, getting a push from his mom. Dancers at his level will tell you their need to dance goes back as far as they can remember.

For Dumas, it wasn't like that.

“Dancing growing up on the south side of Chicago was foreign to me,” he told CBS2's Dave Carlin.”

He says he played a lot of sports, and was more inclined to be a basketball or football player.

In his household headed by a single mom, he says money was tight. His mother learned about Ailey Camp, a charitable arm of the company founded in 1989 by Alvin Ailey that helps at-risk kids. The summer program — for kids ages 11 to 14 — teaches not only dance moves but also personal development and creative writing.

Dumas remembers it was 2001 and he was 12 years old. He did not want to go.

“The stigma of a dancer, I didn't want to go through the scrutiny,” he said.

He says his mom forced him to go through with it, and calls it “an amazing experience.”

Dancers get to travel all over, but Dumas is happy his mom gets to see him and witness how her strong guidance paid off for him. “She wanted me to be surrounded by positive energy and that is the hallmark of the company,” he said.

Dumas was hooked, training at the school non-stop. In 2010 he went on stage with the main company — when the show “Revelations” was given an expanded cast for its 50th Anniversary. Today, he's been hired by Robert Battle — the company's artistic director — who says that Dumas's experience rising from the camp to the top was a first for the program. “He is the embodiment in a way of what Alvin Ailey intended,” he said.

Dumas tells CBS2 that he's bringing dance to the people as it was brought to him all those years ago — all because mother knows best.

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