

DANCE SPIRIT

Meet the Ailey Dancer Who Takes Stunning Photos of Her Coworkers

By: Courtney Celeste Spears

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Danica Paulos, who's now in her fifth season with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, moves with captivating grace and power onstage. And when she's not wowing in-person audiences, the multitasking artist is mesmerizing Ailey's online followers: A gifted photographer, she regularly posts beautiful images of her coworkers to the @alvinailey Instagram page, which she's run for the past two years. We caught up with Paulos to talk about her diverse interests—and find out how she's helped shape AAADT's digital presence.

Paulos fell in love with dancing at 5 years old, after seeing *The Nutcracker* in her hometown of Huntington Beach, CA. "I loved it immediately," she says. "I begged my grandma to put me in classes, and I started taking ballet, tap, and jazz. I always knew it was meant to be." At 16, she began studying at The Ailey School. She spent just one year in Ailey II before being earning a spot in the main company.

Throughout her dance training, Paulos harbored a passion for photography. "I took my very first photography course in high school, where I learned a lot of the basics," she says. "I only had a small digital camera at the time, and then for Christmas, my grandparents bought me my very first professional camera. I was hooked immediately and started taking pictures of everything."

Paulos has run AAADT's Instagram account for two years, and takes most of the photos and videos she posts. "I work with these dancers every day, and they're so open and generous," she says. "How could I not be inspired by their brilliance?" Her keen eye and unique perspective result in images that show the company in a way audiences normally don't normally see it. She specializes in intimate, behind-the-scenes moments that remind viewers of the work it takes to dance at this level—as well as the fun times that keep the dancers laughing and energized.



When asked how she manages an Instagram that has 180K followers—no pressure!—she always circles back to the power of the lens and its ability to capture spontaneous moments. "I don't plan a lot of my posts," she says. "I do my best to be aware and keep my camera with me so I can capture what happens naturally. I used to post on the page every single day, but now I try to take a more relaxed feel and let the moment speak for itself. My camera has always been my best teacher."



One of the most beautiful examples of this practice happened last summer, while the company was on tour in Athens, Greece. Paulos took a breathtaking photo of AAADT's women dressed and posed like Greek goddesses. "Having the beautiful women of this company agree to give their time to work with me was nothing short of magical," she says. "I just asked everyone to get on the steps, said '5,6,7,8,' and the magic created itself!"

As Paulos continues to grow as a dancer, she finds even more joy in capturing the moments around her. She's still learning about video and photography, and plans to take an online course in the future. "I hope that 50 years from now, when a new dancer looks at my photos, that they will resonate with them," she says. "I want others to see their art portrayed beautifully, and to see themselves as the beautiful spirits they are."

To see more of Paulos's work, be sure to follow her personal page, [@lens_of_the_heart](#).

