

**[VIDEO] A dancer moves to stop human sex trafficking**

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By Kristina Puga

Normally, 19-year-old Jenna Graves dances in national and international competitions, or for her full-time job at Ailey II dance company, which will start its New York 2013 season on March 13. But last month she danced for a more serious cause — a student movement on mtvU (MTV’s 24-hour college network) against human sex trafficking.

According to the International Labor Organization, there are more than 20 million sex trafficking victims worldwide, including hundreds of thousands in the U.S. It is also considered to be one of the fastest-growing industries in the world.

Graves, of Puerto Rican descent, plays the lead dance role of an American teenager, in a series of videos called “The Backstory.” These excerpts shed light on the realities of human trafficking in a personal, impactful way, in which college students can be educated on the real-life subject matter and learn to take action to stop it.

“Performing it was an emotional experience,” says Graves who was directed to put herself in the situation and make it believable. “Stuff like this actually happens in the world. It was very surreal to experience that.”

She says the way they filmed the videos was “violent” and “vulnerable.” They used a huge projector and danced at different distances depending on the size of the characters they wanted to portray — from a menacing pimp and stepfather to the subordinate teenage girl.

“Our artistic director, Troy Powell, was the main choreographer,” says Graves about the project, in which music was scored by Kenna and narration was read by rapper Talib Kweli. “...but they were open to our opinions and Graves says she hopes the finished product really makes viewers understand that this is a serious issue and more people need to be aware and try to help out.

“I can just imagine little girls and little boys feeling helpless and not knowing who to talk to,” she says. “This goes to colleges for kids to see and to learn about it. It’s just another way to bring awareness to what’s going on. I learned so much emotionally.”

Presently, the Ailey School scholarship recipient is back to her normal routine of rehearsing from 10am to 6pm, Monday through Friday.

“I’m in my second season with Ailey II,” says Graves, whose wish is to dance with Alvin Ailey’s first company when she gets older. “They are teaching us much more than just dance. We get to travel the world and do something we love.”

