

DANCER'S TURN

Jacqueline Green: A Clean Slate

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By Sarah Elizabeth Lass

As one of five children, Baltimore-native Jacqueline Green grew used to being in the company of others. However, in 2011, this versatile, talented, long-limbed beauty who has now captivated so many joined a different kind of company: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Since then, she has grabbed the attention of audience members, critics, and choreographers, gracefully tackling works from Jiri Kylian's technically-precise *Petit Mort* to Rennie Harris' soulful *Home*.

It may be difficult to believe that 23-year-old Green, featured in *Dance Magazine's* "On The Rise" (May 2013), began her formal study of dance just ten years ago. In fact, it was only at her mother's suggestion that Green auditioned for Baltimore School of the Arts (BSA).

"My sister went to a very good academic school, and my mom was always doing research on schools," Green recalls. BSA stuck out as an outstanding academic institution, but when her mother suggested it, Green admits she was surprised. "I was just like, uh, I don't dance," she laughs, "When I thought of dance, what came to mind was *Fame*."

"I don't know what convinced me, but I auditioned," she says. "I felt extremely naked in my leotard and tights, and I remember thinking it was weird that somebody was touching your body."

One of a handful of selected students, Green then plunged into an intensive and accelerated course of training. "After six months I was on pointe," she remembers.

It's not uncommon for dancers to begin training at a very young age. Did Green find this relatively late start to be a frustration or an obstacle? On the contrary, she believes it worked to her benefit.

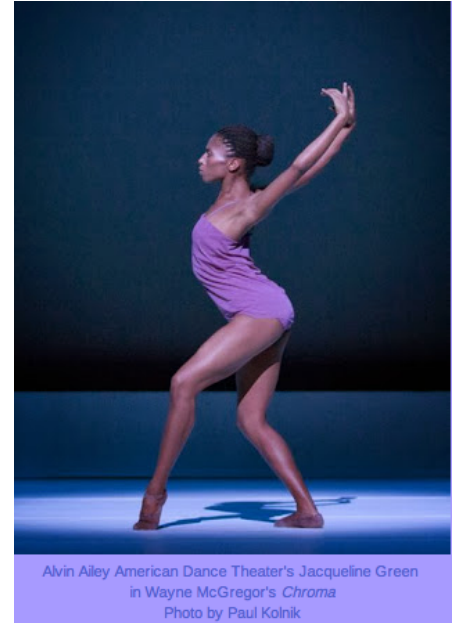
"I had no preconceptions about dance, or habits I'd picked up when I was three," she says, "I was a clean slate."

Linda-Denise Fisher-Harrell--associate professor at Towson University, an Ailey star for thirteen years, a BSA alumna, and one of Green's teachers during her junior year at the school--believes that this clean slate is what lends itself to the "quickness" in Green's learning. Fisher-Harrell--a self-proclaimed former tomboy who auditioned for BSA with the goal of one day dancing in a Michael Jackson video--says of Green, "She entered the school as an open book, and I think there's a beauty to that. You are a blank canvas."

What Green did bring into her training was a joy for movement, something she now recognizes she had at a young age, when she still had no idea that dance could be a career. When I ask about any activities or hobbies before dance, she thinks for a moment and responds, "Even before dance, I loved to dance. I liked music and I liked to dance around the house with my best friend. We were the queens of nineties."

Even though Green does not see her later start as a hindrance, it certainly does not mean that she had it easy. She remembers her beginning ballet class with Anton Wilson, and how much she struggled with one of his combinations.

"After a month I finally got it, and I felt that success, and I wanted to keep going." With each small victory, like the one in Wilson's class, dance became Green's passion and joy. "It was a slow love affair," she admits, "but it fills you up like nothing else."





AAADTs Rachael McLaren, Jacqueline Green, and Glenn Allen Sims
Photo by Andrew Eccles

Green's teachers recognized this desire to *keep going*, this hunger, drive and, perhaps more than that, a willingness to work. Fisher-Harrell says, "It's not that Jackie did everything perfectly, but she really wasn't afraid to work. When things didn't happen right away, you never doubted that she would get it."

Fisher-Harrell admits that if there is such a thing as a "model student," Green was it. "She is just a joy," Fisher-Harrell says, "She has this attitude like, 'Yes, I am here and I want to learn and I am happy about it.'" For Fisher-Harrell, this kind of work ethic is everything. "Your work ethic is all you have, and that starts from the first moment you walk into the studio. It's about how you take care of your body and how you stay in the practice of dance. You have to be in constant research of the next level."

Green herself was struck by this work ethic when Fisher-Harrell came to teach ballet at BSA during Green's junior year. Green remembers thinking, "She has it, and she's still working." This insistence on growth and improvement was something Green saw and absorbed early on, and is something that Fisher-Harrell believes is essential to the success of any professional performer. "I always thought of myself as a student, even as a principal dancer. If you approach things that way it keeps you hungry, always seeking," Fisher-Harrell says.

As her time at BSA drew to a close, Green began to look for a similar opportunity in higher education. "You got to go to college," Green says, "An education is priceless." Just as BSA impressed Green and her family years earlier, the Ailey/Fordham Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) Program similarly offered excellence in both dance and academics.

Upon her acceptance, Green relocated to New York. "I think I always had it in the back of my head that I wanted to dance, and then I came to New York and realized people were doing it," Green says. At this time, too, she saw her first performance of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. "I became a groupie," she laughs, "I would run over to City Center after class!"

I asked Green about her experience in the Ailey/Fordham Program and her day-to-day schedule.

"In many ways, college is harder than being in the company," she explained. "You're a full-time Fordham student and a full-time Ailey student." Indeed, Green's days were packed from early morning until late evening with academic classes, dance technique classes, rehearsals, homework as well as the time she spent alone in the studio.

Despite an already demanding schedule, Green began to apprentice with the company during her junior year. By senior year, she was officially an Ailey member. How did she handle the many obligations of being both a full-time student and company member with one of the world's most famous and highly-acclaimed dance companies?

She laughs and says, "I made it work."

Green reflects on her first two years with the company with maturity and a level of insight not expected from such a young professional. Green's first year included an eleven-week international touring, marking the first time Green left the country. "The first year was about learning the repertory and knowing how to tour and stay inspired," Green says, "You figure out how to be with the company and be your own person."

What, then, inspires her?

"Anything. Anything can inspire me." It could be something from one of her favorite TV shows, *Scandal*, or the long walks through foreign cities that she enjoys taking while the company is on tour. As Green mentions her co-workers, her voice sparks with admiration and enthusiasm. Clearly, she feels joy in working with such talented people everyday. "We can be just cracking up on stage, and that reflects to the audience, they feel it too."

Beyond her professional duties in dance, community outreach--such as the educational work the company did in Argentina this September--also gives her pleasure and a sense of purpose.



Jacqueline Green
Photo by Freddie Rankin

“The passion in these kids,” she says, trailing off, her amazement clear in her voice, “You see it and you absorb it.” Outreach, Green explains, helps to refresh and renew Green’s practice and approach to her own work. “It takes me back to that first year,” she says, in reference to the beginning of her own training ten years ago.

This is, she believes, her biggest artistic and personal challenge. “Going back to that clean slate, it’s always the challenge.” Green explains that after learning the repertory and getting accustomed to life in the company, as Green did in her first year, things can get comfortable. In approaching each new day of dancing and each piece on which she works, Green says, “I need to open my brain, absorb new information, and not do it like I would do any other piece.”

We talked about the various roles Green has tackled during her time with Ailey. She has dived into so many different ones.

Discovering her character starts with the movement, she says, and then develops during the rehearsal process. “Whenever we’re rehearsing something I think, ‘What kind of

character does this movement make me?’”

After that, Green picks a hairstyle. She has sported high, fountain ponytails, mohawks, braids, and more. This light, playful spirit does not only pertain to her approach to character development, but also to her daily practice as well. “I like to be the performer,” she admits. “I’m a crazy kind of girl—I have the crazy-colored tights, and the tie-dye leotard.”

“She’s just a fun-loving girl,” Fisher-Harrell confirms, “Faithful, fun-loving, and caring.” This vivacious personality and kind spirit endears her to friends, teachers, and co-workers. “You know what I love about her?” Fisher-Harrell asks animatedly, “She’s sweet! You can tell in the studio, with her friends and in her interactions with her colleagues. They just love her.”

Green’s ability to commit herself wholeheartedly to something foreign or uncertain, without judgment or premature analysis means allowing herself to be vulnerable.

“You let go of all those fears, and you become vulnerable again,” she says. “That’s how you started everything. That vulnerability is courageous, and it took me awhile to figure that out.”

As Fisher-Harrell says, “Her journey is what is so fascinating, how she takes material and progresses through it.” With such an outstanding work ethic and unending dedication to personal growth and discovery, I can only predict that Green’s return to the stage this season will be a joy to witness, each performance a lesson in renewal and rejuvenation.

BIO

Jacqueline Green (Baltimore, MD) began her dance training at the Baltimore School for the Arts under the direction of Norma Pera, Deborah Robinson and Anton Wilson. She is a graduate of The Ailey/Fordham BFA Program in Dance. Ms. Green has attended summer programs at Pennsylvania Regional Ballet, Chautauqua Institution, Earl Mosley’s Institute of the Arts and Jacob’s Pillow. She has performed works by a variety of choreographers, including Elisa Monte, Helen Pickett, Francesca Harper, Aszure Barton, Earl Mosley and Michael Vernon. In November 2009, Ms. Green was the recipient of the Martha Hill’s Young Professional’s Award and the Dizzy Feet Scholarship in 2010. She was a member of Ailey II and joined the Company in 2011.

For more information on the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s New York City Center season (December 4-January 5), click [here](#).



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Photo by Andrew Eccles