



## DANCING WITH ALVIN AILEY: ONE WOMAN'S PATH TO THE TOP OF ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS COMPANIES IN THE WORLD

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For many dance is something you do as a hobby, at a party, or entertainment to simply go watch. It's hard to mesh the words "dance" and "career" into the same sentence. The false idea persists that if your pursuing something "creative," you haven't quite made it because, certainly, mommy and daddy are not paying for you to be an artist. But Alvin Ailey dancers are doing it. They are making it work through hard work, dedication and a strong sense of resilience. Their season starts today and the troupe makes their first stop in New York City.

Demetia Hopkins is a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Company, where she's been dancing for the last four years. She went through the rigors of the Ailey/Fordham B.F.A program where she graduated in 2009, and was a recipient of a Leonore Annenberg Fellowship in the Arts in 2009. The coveted four-year program requires acceptance into Fordham University, as well as a series of auditions for Ailey in order to be admitted. She started as a member of Ailey II and joined the Company in 2010.

"The year I applied only 20-something dancers made it," Hopkins said.



Hopkins has trained with the National Youth Ballet of Virginia, Virginia School of the Arts, the Summer Dance International Course in Burgos, Spain, The Rock School, and Dance Theatre of Harlem School. As a dancer she's had the opportunity to dance with the company traveling from state to state, as well as internationally. Traveling and getting reactions from different audiences has propelled her both personally and as a dancer.

"I have always been drawn to this company, going to the Kennedy Center and watching Alvin Ailey, it's really incredible to dance with and interact with this company," Hopkins said, adding that the experience with the dance company gives her the sense that she has a connection with Mr. Ailey and his artistic vision. She says she feels "comfortable" doing this rigorous, but beautiful work "in a way that this just makes sense."

Hopkins dance story begins in Virginia where she started dancing at the age of four under the training of her uncle, Ricardo Porter Jr., who owns a dance studio. She didn't have a performing arts school in her neighborhood, so she went to public school, and developed the discipline needed as a dancer while working with her uncle. Under her uncle's training, she explored various genres of dance including jazz, lyrical, lyrical hip-hop and musical theater.

"I don't just have one favorite genre of dance. I love switching back and forth between one genre and the next, even in the same performance," Hopkins said.

Growing up, she would go to the Kennedy Center to see Alvin Ailey performances. "I always thought it was really incredible," Hopkins said.

In order to make a career as a dancer work, it takes a community of supportive individuals, Hopkins notes. Beyond the

support of her own family the community and culture she has been surrounded by have helped her to grow, as both an individual and a dancer.

“At the same time you have to stay competitive within this community, which allows you to grow as an artist and as an individual at the same time,” Hopkins said.

Since joining the company, Hopkins notes her personal growth and the lessons she’s learned through dancing. To prepare for the “sacred” touring time, Ailey dancers begin their period of rehearsing six-to-eight weeks before they start performing. A typical dance rehearsal takes place over seven hours, Monday through Friday.

“For me I have always been on the shy side and dance is the best way for me to express myself. If I can’t express myself through words I can definitely do it through movement,” Hopkins said. Beyond the world of dance Hopkins enjoys decorating her home and is engaged, with plans to get married next year. In the future Hopkins hopes to take over her uncle’s dance studio, she would like to eventually start an outreach program for dancers and kids in need. She is using her career as a dancer to leverage future career goals. Hopkins career as a dancer has allowed her to do a lot of community outreach. She hopes to one day have her own arts education program, that will server her Orange County, VA community where she grew up.

“I am living in the moment more than anything else. I am really thinking about staying in the moment, because in some ways you can just really let things go by without taking notes of brilliant moments,” Hopkins said.

