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Jacqueline Green

Confidence and grace are the Ailey dancer's trademarks.

BY LAUREN KAY

Last December, Jacqueline Green's performance as a flirty working girl out on the town in *Another Night*, Kyle Abraham's new work for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, was a lesson in technical strength and stage presence. Fluid but precise, she moved with feline self-possession across the New York City Center stage. Later, in Ailey's trademark *Revelations*, her unabashed joy, attention to detail, and regal steadiness carried her through with a maturity rare in a relative newcomer.

Robert Battle, Ailey's artistic director, says all these qualities caught his eye when Green danced in *Ailey II*. "What struck me about Jacqueline was not only her obvious physical prowess, but her ability to transmit emotion without having to step on the gas fully," he says. "It seemed natural for her to exude confidence and daring. It's just her being."

After moving to the main company two years ago, Green, 23, has been increasingly featured. "She's a hard worker, driven and versatile," says Battle. "She has the ability to do it all—brilliantly."

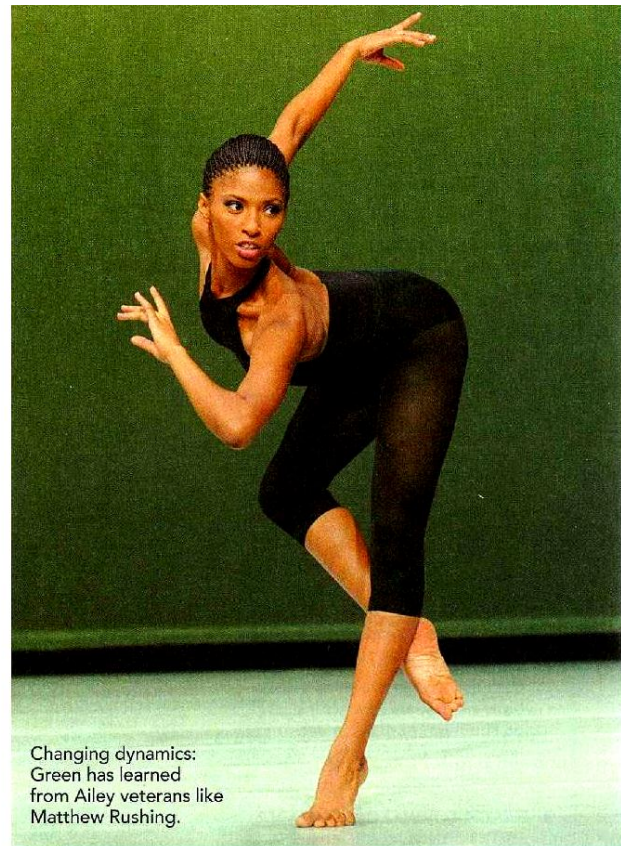
Green grew up in Baltimore, and did not begin dancing until she reached her teens. Though she simply had been looking for a high school with good academics, her mother encouraged her to audition for the Baltimore School of the Arts, hoping to see her daughter live out one of her own dreams by discovering dance. Green, 13, was accepted, and fell in love with dance

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her first week there. "I was introverted as a child," says Green. "But when we were in dance class, where you had to project and express yourself, it was a release. Somewhere along the way I realized I loved being able to step out of my shell."

At the School of the Arts, she made ballet her focus, creating a strong technical foundation. "I liked how delicate ballet was," she says. "It felt special and unique." Applying for college, Green thought dance would be a path to scholarships, although she was not yet sure that it would be her career. But at the Ailey/Fordham BFA program, she became convinced. "My freshman year, I saw Ailey live for the first time," she remembers. "I returned to see them at least 20 times. I was in awe! I realized I wanted to be a professional dancer—with Ailey."

Though it was difficult to balance academics and dance, a summer at Jacob's Pillow fast-tracked Green's career. "While I was there, Milton Myers asked me if I wanted to be in Ailey II. I said yes, of course," she recalls. Myers spoke with Sylvia Waters, then the second company's director, and Green was



Changing dynamics: Green has learned from Ailey veterans like Matthew Rushing.

invited to apprentice with the company during her junior year. Soon she joined the second company; the job security made Green's final year of school considerably less anxiety-ridden.

After a year with Ailey II, she auditioned for the main company. When she got through all the cuts and realized she had made it, she remembers, "I just went silent and my mouth dropped." She soon discovered she had only two weeks to learn the repertoire before her first full-company tour.

Among the most fulfilling aspects of her job has been learning from veteran company members. "Renee Robinson has taught me how to be a character onstage, how to research, develop, and commit to a story," she says. "Matthew Rushing has taught me how to change dynamics—how an artistic choice can transform the same choreography."

Green welcomes the chance to perform new work like *Another Night*, but she has a special love of Alvin Ailey's choreography, especially *Revelations*. "It's the theater of it, the dynamics," she says. "It's perfection structurally and it's deep in the body, so if you just do the movement you will feel the feeling." A jazz fan, she also singles out the sassy lead in Ailey's *Pas de Duke*, which she danced recently, as one of her dream roles. "It's like jazz: spontaneous, groovy, and smooth."

While Green wants to take voice lessons and explore musical theater eventually, right now she's thrilled to dance with Ailey, and hopes to grow there. Battle says Green's focus and fierce talent should lead to many more opportunities. "In the rehearsal room, she's quiet and observant, deconstructing the information in her mind," he says. "There's never a sense that something is too difficult for her: She will make it work for her body, and do so with grace. She can write her own ticket."

Lauren Kay is a NYC-based dancer and writer.