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Alvin Ailey Dancers Spill Their Beauty Secrets

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Belen Pereyra dances Ronald K. Brown's *Four Corners*.

Sure dancers do incredible things with their bodies, but they also have to do awesome things with their hair and makeup. Their entire look, from head to toe, tells a non-verbal story on stage. And sweating, jumping, sliding, lifting, and spinning around makes for a unique set of beauty challenges.

I recently had the privilege of watching the Alvin Ailey dancers in New York City rehearse a piece for their new season, where they did things like jump onto their partners' shoulders and slide across the floor on their bellies. A common direction I heard was, "Move more frenetically!" Afterwards, I sat down with two slightly sweaty yet incredibly welcoming members of the company, Linda Celeste Sims and Belen Pereyra, to talk to them about the products they swear by and the beauty tips they've picked up over the years. If it stays put for them, you can be sure it'll see you through your busiest day.

Linda, 38, has been a professional dancer for 21 years, with Ailey for 19. She is a self-professed beauty junkie and taught herself how to do her own makeup thanks to tips she picked up from makeup artists along the way. She also swears by the late makeup artist Kevyn Aucoin's now-iconic book, *Making Faces*. Belen, 26, on the other hand, calls herself "laid back" when it comes to makeup but "being in this company has pushed me to want to learn a little more."



Celeste Sims in Ailey's *The River*.

EYES

Don't be afraid of a paint-by-numbers approach. Belen bought an inexpensive eye shadow palette at Victoria's Secret that has instructions for how to create a smoky eye on the packaging. "It takes me ten minutes to do my makeup now," she told me.

Then there are the fake eyelashes. Because facial features need to pop onstage, many dancers use fake lashes. Over the years, Linda has figured out the perfect formula for making them last and, more importantly stay on. (Yes, she's had lashes fly off in the middle of a performance.) Both dancers swear that Duo adhesive is the best, and that the harder-to-find black color is preferable to clear, because it enhances the look of eyeliner and looks more natural when you have to run on the stage with semi-damp eyelash glue.

Linda buys cheapie lashes at local stores, but she can make them last for a whole tour. She removes them carefully, brushes them to get any makeup off, and then stores them for the next performance.



Pereyra, last season.

FACE

Because sweat is generally the enemy of makeup, dancers have to find ways to make it stay on during performances. Of her favorite finishing powder, Linda says, “You can pour water on me and it won’t come off!” So what is this mighty weapon? CoverGirl TTKK. “A makeup artist turned me on to it years ago,” Linda says. She takes an old hair gel container and mixes the “fair” and “medium” shades to get the complexion match she needs. Belen uses it now, too, and also swears by its longevity.

As you can imagine, sweating, especially with a lot of makeup on, can wreak havoc on a dancer’s complexion. Belen is a loyal user of Proactiv’s anti-acne line, and Linda uses Neutrogena cleansers and moisturizers after a lot of trial and error. “I tried all the expensive brands and nothing worked,” she says.

HAIR

Both dancers have curly hair, but Belen’s curls are loose and soft while Linda’s are tighter and “drier.” Both are fiercely loyal to their hair products. Belen said Eco Styling Gel holds her up-dos in place, tames frizz, and is never crunchy. Linda uses a concoction of several different products: Italian Midollo conditioners mixed with Biolage deep conditioner, and Fekkai Glossing Cream.

Finally, the most important beauty tip involves something a bit more intangible than a finishing powder. “If you think happy thoughts and you’re loving, that stuff comes back to you and it shows in your body and skin,” Belen said. “If you’re always stressed and angry, it reflects, no matter how many products you put on.”



Linda Celeste Sims