

The Virginian-Pilot

For a shy Virginia woman, her foothold with a major dance troupe gave her a stage for growth

By: Rashod Ollison

February 25, 2016

Her uncle taught the painfully shy girl to dance.

Until she was 12 years old and her mother got married and had three more children, Demetia Hopkins-Greene grew up an only child in a quiet, close-knit community in Orange, Va. There wasn't much to do in the little town about 30 miles northeast of Charlottesville. But her uncle's dance studio, where Greene started studying at age 4, was the ideal beginning for where she would end up.

The discipline and shaping of her talent eventually led Greene to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, one of the premier dance companies in the country. She and others in the troupe will perform at Chrysler Hall in Norfolk tonight through Sunday as part of the Virginia Arts Festival.

"My uncle trained me for sure, but my mother really pushed me," says Greene, who's 28. "I don't know. She's more than words can say."



Although she had been dancing most of her life, Greene wasn't sure about pursuing it as a career until she was about to leave Orange for college. She attended Fordham University in New York, where she earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in dance in 2009.

"It was just something I absolutely loved to do," Greene says, calling from her home in New York City. "I was a quiet child. My husband jokes that I was basically mute when he met me. I express myself better through movement sometimes than through words."

Her reticence belies her grace and explosiveness on stage. In 2010, Greene joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, an experience that has taken her far beyond the quaint town of Orange.

"I have traveled the world more than I ever thought I would," Greene says. "Being around these people has made me challenge myself, and in many way has taught me how to be a woman. These are people who really care about what they do and care about you. I've been really blessed to be in a place that has developed my art form as well as my character."

How so?

Greene is quiet for a moment. "Performing in front of people every night, you have to have a certain self-assurance," she says. "I'm sure of myself when I step out onto that stage. Learning that I have a lot of insecurities to overcome and figuring out what would make me better has made me a stronger person."

Returning to Virginia to perform with the company that has been so instrumental in pulling her out of her shell gives Greene a new sense of accomplishment.

"There's always a certain comfort and pride when you're dancing in front of people you know," Greene says. "There are a lot of values that this company presents to the community. It's not just about the legs and the physicality of it. It's giving back. It's a homecoming."