

## **Buckhead Woman Reaches for Dream of Becoming Alvin Ailey Dancer For one young woman from Buckhead, her dream is just steps away.**

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By Kiri Walton

She didn't always think she'd be a dancer. For Buckhead native Samantha Jones, ballet has always just been something she's done and enjoyed for the fun of it. Now, she's in her last semester as a senior at Fordham University where she is training at the prestigious Alvin Ailey School, hoping to be one of the students invited to audition in April for the legendary African-American dance troupe.



Jones first started ballet classes at the age of 4 in her native country of Jamaica. There, she started with London's Royal Academy of Dance ballet syllabus. Three years later, she and her family moved to Atlanta where she began taking dance classes at the Callanwolde Fine Arts Center. There she honed her dancing skills until the end of her senior year at St. Pius Catholic School in 2009.

Ballet was Jones' lifesaver as she waded through the new American Southern culture of Atlanta. Moving to Buckhead from Jamaica was a smooth adjustment for Jones because one key part of her life remained the same—ballet. Pulling on her tights, leotard and slippers was a comfort to Jones and a way to form bonds and relationships that would last throughout her teenage years.

"The school I went to was...very welcoming," Jones said. "Something was familiar," she explained. That something was dance. "I think it would've probably (been challenging), but I found something that I was used to."

Throughout her rigorous 14 years of training, she still never saw dance as her calling or a career choice, she said. "My teachers always told me I had a lot of potential," she said.

And at some point, she said, it all clicked. She just knew. She was awarded the LaFarge Merit Scholarship from Fordham University and the Glorvia Kaufman Artistic Scholarship from The Ailey School. Now, she learns from some of the country's most elite dancers and has worked with and performed works by a number of prestigious choreographers including Robert Battle, Milton Myers, Elisa Monte and Robert Moses.

"This program just really trains you," Jones said. "I just really felt like my artistry and who I am has been reaffirmed." For Jones, and for many other black dancers, Alvin Ailey opened doors that were once slammed shut and locked. Seeing the Ailey dancers perform can be a transformative experience that inspires and validates black dancers, Jones said.

"I definitely remember when I first saw them," Jones said about the Alvin Ailey company. "I was awestruck. I wanted to be able to do that for others...as a dancer."

That affirmation came not just from being at Fordham, but from being in New York City, immersed in the dance culture and seeing other dancers who look like her.

"It's definitely inspirational," she said about watching the Alvin Ailey dancers. "I don't necessarily have the ideal ballet body."

Seeing the Alvin Ailey dancers has been "such a positive reinforcement," she said. "In the dance world, there's a place for everyone."

*Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is coming to Atlanta for Feb. 14-17. The Fordham BFA program at the Ailey school will be hosting auditions in Atlanta Sunday, February 17.*