

Caribbean Life

Dancing to her heart's content

By Deardra Shuler
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Life can be a testament to one's mettle. How one faces personal setbacks and challenges is always an individual decision and evidence of their will to authenticate their true nature. Ailey II dancer, Paige Fraser, has met every challenge with the attitude of a champion. At age 4, Paige had not determined what she wanted to become in life. She only knew she enjoyed swimming and ice-skating, so when her Caribbean born parents enrolled her in dance class, it was just another fun thing to do.

A first generation American, Ms. Fraser recognized by the time she was 12 years old, that dancing had stolen her heart. It was just about then, while undergoing a physical examination, the doctors pronounced she had scoliosis, a curvature of the spin. They suggested the disease might put a damper on her dancing. They advised an operation. Since an operation could not promise a cure, Paige's parents opted for more natural remedies to help balance the spin such as yoga and more dancing.



To date, Paige has never had an operation, and is still dancing, doing what she must to keep her spin stabilized. "I am using Gyrotonics, therapy, yoga, massage, and chiropractors. And so far, I have proven the doctors wrong. It's just being sensible and knowing what I can and can not do. As a dancer, I must be aware of what I eat and how I respect my body. Amazingly, few people even notice I have scoliosis," said the young ballerina proudly. It was also challenging initially for Paige to find ballet schools with a diverse racial mix.

Dancing requires a great deal of training, discipline and hard work since Paige practices all forms of dance from ballet, African, modern, jazz, etc. In pursuit of her craft, Paige attended a professional performance high school and later studied at Dominican College in California, taking advantage of a BSA program in conjunction with Alonzo King Lines dance methods, training with some of his dancers.

Transferring to New York, she also trained in summer programs at American Ballet Theatre, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Jacob's Pillow, Juilliard, and Complexions and has worked with Desmond Richardson, Darrell Grand Moultrie, and Camille A. Brown. Enrolled at Fordham University, she is part of their BSA Program in conjunction with Alvin Ailey.

"The BFA program gives a BA in Fine Arts, which is a set core curriculum that allows a student to enjoy an academic program while pursuing an interest in dance at a dance theatre such as Alvin Ailey. So you can get the degree while also dancing," explained Paige who is presently experiencing her first year with Ailey II, having been chosen among 12 selected dancers to dance with the Ailey II troupe, out of 1500 competitors.

Presently on a 35-city North American tour that included Texas, Alabama, Indiana, Wisconsin, South and North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and LA, Ailey II, will be returning to the Ailey Citigroup Theatre in NYC, where they will be performing from April 18-29, for a highly anticipated two weeks. Sadly this will also be the farewell season for artistic director, Sylvia Waters, who has lent her dance mastery to the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre for 38 years.



In 2010, Ms. Fraser performed in Alvin Ailey's "Memoria" as a special production of Revelations, in celebration of its 50th year during the company's New York City season.

"As part of a two-year program, I am grateful to be experiencing my first year with Ailey II. I am lucky I've received mentoring from Ms. Waters and was able to reap the benefit of her knowledge. I will continue under Troy Powell who will become the new artistic director. I hope that Sylvia Waters will continue to be an asset to the Ailey organization. A lot of the parts I now perform in "Revelations," she performed, so I am grateful for the notes and corrections she offers to me. She is very good at bringing out the best in her dancers," said Fraser.

"I encourage people to never give up and just follow their dream. I have overcome many obstacles to get where I am today and I am just at the beginning of my journey. But I have never given up and I encourage others to never give up either."

Ailey's NYC Performance will feature three new works and three repertory favorites, and 14 dance numbers such as Echoes, Boulevard, Reference Point, the Corner, Legacy of Inheritance and Shards.