

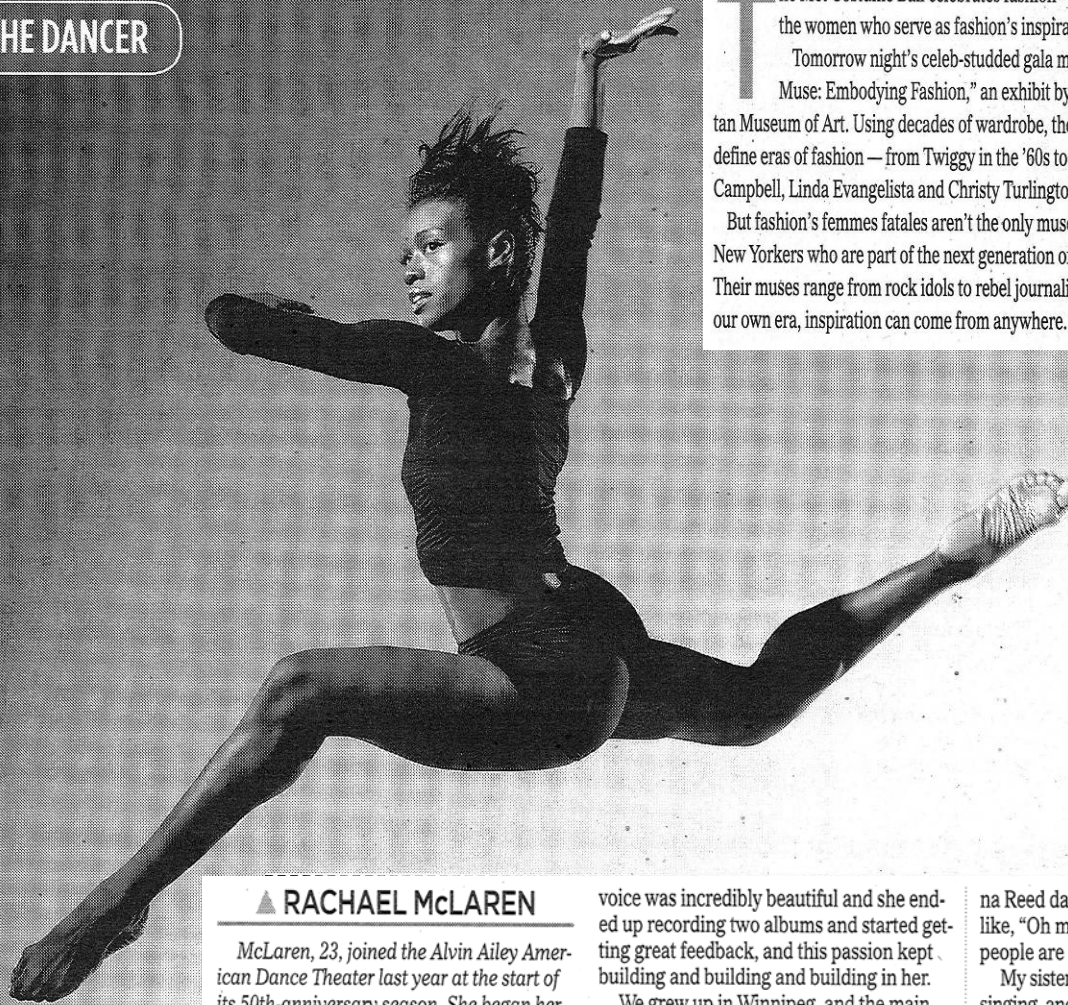
DAILY NEWS

INSPIRED WORK

From politics to the arts, rising stars recall the people who shaped their careers

BY PATRICK HUGUENIN

THE DANCER



▲ RACHAEL MCLAREN

McLaren, 23, joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater last year at the start of its 50th-anniversary season. She began her dance training in ballet in her native Canada; her move to New York to follow her dream was spurred, in part, by her older sister. McLaren lives in Brooklyn and can be seen performing with the Ailey troupe at BAM June 9-14.

I have two brothers and a sister, and I'm the youngest. My sister, Dorcas, who's 14 years older than me, she played the piano well. I remember falling asleep under the piano bench, just listening to her play, because I felt like I could be surrounded by this music.

She started singing a little bit later in life. She was always shy about her voice, but her

voice was incredibly beautiful and she ended up recording two albums and started getting great feedback, and this passion kept building and building and building in her.

We grew up in Winnipeg, and the main company in Winnipeg is the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. So I was a bun-head. I wanted to be the prima ballerina. But it's kind of hard to be a young, black female dancer pushing through in that area of dance. I was auditioning for a bunch of different schools for their summer programs so that once I graduated high school I could figure out what I wanted to do, and the principal of my school was like, "Rachael, there's this company, it's called the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. I want you to go to the school for the summer program. I know that you'll love it."

So I went. And I remember seeing Brian-

na Reed dance. As soon as I saw her, I was like, "Oh my God, I want to do this. These people are so beautiful."

My sister was still feeling a passion for her singing, and then she developed cancer and passed away quite suddenly. She was only 34 when she passed away. It was in 2005, just when I decided to make my move to New York, and she was a very, very big inspiration. We'd gotten closer even as we moved away from each other, and her passing was a push for me to surround myself with what I loved.

I'm just finishing my first year with Ailey, and it's pretty amazing to be able to join a company at such a height of celebration. People in the audience, they are here because this company has been around for so long and they've seen it since they were kids and they can't get enough of it.

The Met Costume Ball celebrates fashion — but this year's party also tips its hat to the women who serve as fashion's inspiration.

Tomorrow night's celeb-studded gala marks the opening of "The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion," an exhibit by the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Using decades of wardrobe, the show proves that great models can define eras of fashion — from Twiggy in the '60s to the '80s glamour trinity (Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista and Christy Turlington) to the grungy chic of '90s Kate Moss.

But fashion's femmes fatales aren't the only muses out there, Meet five creative New Yorkers who are part of the next generation of design, film, dance, music and politics. Their muses range from rock idols to rebel journalists and show that, in terms of defining our own era, inspiration can come from anywhere.