



## How Did I Get Here?

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Fana Tesfagiorgis.  
Photo: Eduardo Patino

Sometimes I wake up in my hotel room in the middle of the night and wonder if it's all a dream—the rare locations, the lights, and the crowds pleading for encores. Am I really a professional dancer? Indeed, I remind myself before rolling over to fall back asleep... I am a professional dancer with Ailey II!

I also like to remind myself that even with all of the training, dedication, and extensive efforts to balance artistic and academic strides, I did not earn the position that I'm in all by myself. My parents, brothers, and relatives believed in me from the start, and they have given me the most consistent and reassuring love and support in dance and in life. Under our Artistic Director, Sylvia Waters, and our Associate Artistic Director, Troy Powell, I have gotten some of the most remarkable guidance that a young artist could have. To be a great artist, I do believe a person needs great teachers, and I'm blessed to have received them from Ballet Madison, Interlochen Arts Academy, Earl Mosley's Institute of the Arts, The Ailey School/Fordham University, and now Ailey II. My directors, teachers, and choreographers have always challenged me to take each movement at least a mile farther than I knew possible.

Alvin Ailey, Judith Jamison, and Robert Battle—the past, present, and future of the greatest dance company in the world—have made a major impact on me. I have had the chance to learn about each of these innovators and I greatly appreciate the paths they have and will continue to pave. Through the works that I have gotten to perform by Mr. Ailey, Ms. Jamison and Mr. Battle, I can say that I truly understand what it feels like to wring out and share every drop of my spirit with the audience, always amongst a cast of peers doing the same.

My heroes and sheroes in Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and other companies (who have often doubled as my teachers at some point) demonstrate such an unbelievable mastery of technical and artistic ability that I cannot help but be inspired by them onstage and in the classroom. Plus my fellow dancers in Ailey II always interpret choreography in a refreshing way and encourage me to do the same. They surprise me every day!

Our production crew is divine. By continuously checking our lights, outfits, and schedules, they do all of our worrying for us, and help us find the mental space to focus on the art itself. They're always out for our best interest. I mean, how many lighting supervisors or stage or company managers do you know who would literally step outside after an avalanche to help dig our tour bus out of the Colorado mountain snow? (True story!)

I also have to mention the young students that we teach on the road through our outreach programs. They come from all backgrounds and yet they always seem to have the same wide-eyed reaction to dance. They encourage me to stay fascinated by what I do.

Last and greatest, God has been the source of strength in all that I do, reminding me that nothing is impossible. It is because of Him that I am surrounded by so much love, and I get so humbly grateful at the thought that I get to do what I love to do for a living.



A photo from my prime dancing days at Madison Ballet in 1993. Photo by Freida High Wasikhongo Tesfagiorgis

After an extensive US tour, we are preparing to head to the UK in a couple of weeks. I look forward to the adventures that await us there, and will keep you posted the whole way.

Fana