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Ghrai DeVore

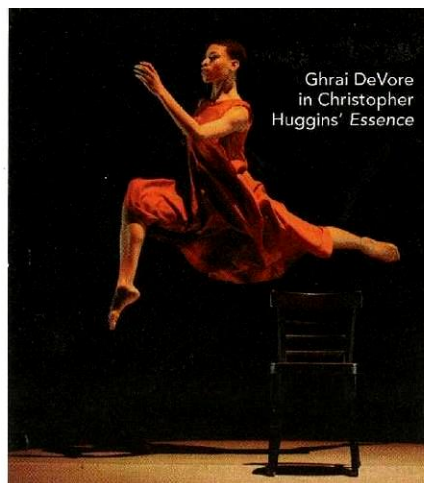
Forceful yet precise, this Ailey dancer stands out.

BY SUSAN YUNG

Near the end of Rennie Harris' new piece *Home* for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, there is a section that the dancers have dubbed "twinkletoes" for its fast footwork. As they rehearse it, Ghrai DeVore flicks through the intricate, rapid combination with delicacy and precision. It's an eye-catching performance. Even in a company of versatile and high-powered dancers, DeVore, a relative newcomer, has begun to distinguish herself.

In artistic director Robert Battle's first full season, DeVore has been cast in several premieres. She has been rehearsing Paul Taylor's *Arden Court*, as well as Harris' hip-hop-based paean to AIDS survivors. Though the two styles contrast sharply, DeVore's well-rounded training—including ballet, African, and Graham—has given her the tools to handle the company's ever-diversifying repertoire with aplomb. "Both pieces are a completely different style of moving from what most of us are used to," she says. "It's creating a nice change of energy."

Originally from Washington, DC, DeVore, 22, began studying tap and ballet at age 4. She first saw AAADT as an elementary school student in Chicago, where she and her mother, a dancer with Deeply Rooted Dance Theater (see "Vital Signs"), had moved. She decided that she "wanted to be part of that continuum." When she finished high school at 16, however, she joined Hubbard Street 2. It took a year or two before she felt ready to try her luck in New York. Once there she entered The Ailey School's fellowship program. Soon she had an offer from Ailey II artistic director Sylvia Waters. Two years later, in 2010, she joined the main company. "I always felt Ghrai had a very uncanny sense of immediacy with movement, in particular with nuance, phrasing, dynamics, and



Ghrai DeVore
in Christopher
Huggins' *Essence*

musicality," says Waters. She then adds: "She's one of the bright stars."

During the Rennie Harris rehearsal, DeVore was in the second cast. As Harris worked with the first cast, second cast members shadowed them. DeVore mirrored one of the company's stars, Linda Celeste Sims. Both have petite, wiry builds, and the ability to render movements fully but with an articulated refinement. DeVore also shares a maturity that allows her to transcend self-consciousness and channel her energy into the movement at hand. It is a balance of mental and physical intelligence that can often take many more years to refine.

Battle has given her opportunities across the repertoire for the coming season. "I love her in Ailey's work," he says. "She's wonderful in *Streams*, which we're bringing back. She has her own singular voice." Waters too notes DeVore's distinctive stage presence—"almost creature-like," she says. Indeed, with a gyroscopic sense of balance, DeVore makes the most difficult passages look smooth.

DeVore's mind is never far from dance. "I devote most of my time outside the studio to relaxing and strengthening my muscles for the coming day," she says. But she wants to continue to develop as a person as well as an artist. "Dance is my medium, but life is my art," she says. She had always dreamed of dancing a Ulysses Dove role, and this season she will dance two, one in *Episodes* and the other in *Urban Folk Dance*. And she will perform another role she has long coveted—the angel in Ailey's *Memoria*. "She's proven that when she puts her mind to it, she can do anything," Battle says. "I think the sky's the limit for Ghrai."

Eduardo Palino, Courtesy AAADT

Susan Yung is a New York culture writer.