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Dynamic Duo

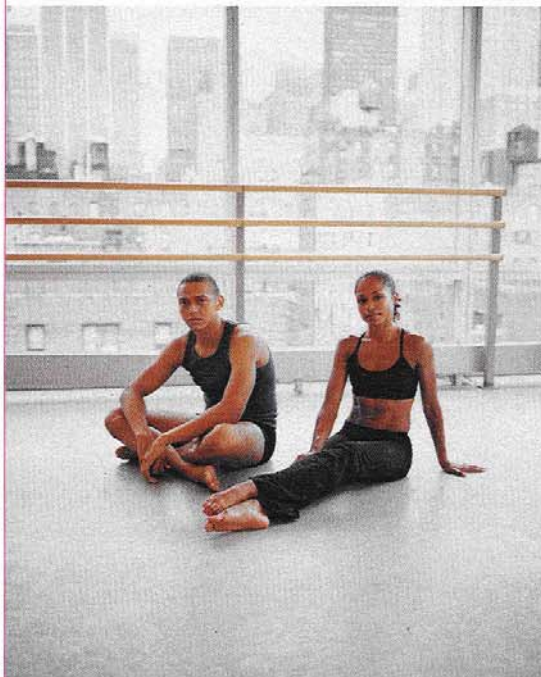
Photograph by
KATHRYN ALLEN HURNI

Clifton Brown was such a clumsy kid that his grandmother enrolled him in tumbling class when he was just four. The experiment took, and Brown soon turned to ballet, but an awkward growth spurt at 13 gave him pause. It was then that the Goodyear, Arizona, native saw a performance by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater—on a videotape he'd borrowed from the library. In a tour de force called *Cry*, dancer Donna Wood made a maelstrom of her upper body. "I had never understood what was beautiful about my long arms," he says. "They made you look sloppy. But I was amazed at what Donna could express with them. I thought, Maybe I can do that."

It turns out that he can. As versatile as he is poetic, his athleticism harnessed to a virtuoso technique, Brown, 29, is the dancer to watch as the Ailey troupe celebrates its 50th year with a nationwide tour and a five-week season at New York City Center that kicks off in December. Thoughtful and shy, Brown, offstage, looks like a studious kid, with his black-rimmed eyeglasses and mouthful of braces. To see him move is to marvel that the dynamo onstage is the same person. "Just making my way around in life, I still trip over my own feet," he admits.

Brown's frequent partner is the equally luminous Linda Celeste Sims, 31, whose supple, sensual dancing is shot through with astonishing physical control. Together, says the Bronx-bred Sims, "we're known as the long-armed ones. Sometimes we have to adjust the choreography so that we're not too far away from each other." The duo will be paired in a gamut of works this season, including Ailey's *Blues Suite*, the first piece the company ever performed. "It's a marriage of mind and body, when it comes to the bar they've set for themselves," says Ailey artistic director Judith Jamison. Sims once wanted to be a classical ballerina but now relishes the opportunities she has at Ailey to show off her range. "I'm small," she says, "but I dance big."

—DIANE SOLWAY



Clifton Brown and
Linda Celeste Sims
in the Ailey studio

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