

Dating

Hooking up with: Two dancers By Julia Allison

Our columnist starts crashing relationships, beginning with Olivia and Abdur-Rahim.

Olivia Bowman, 29, and Abdur-Rahim Jackson, 30, have the kind of love story you'd describe as magical, if you—a cool, jaded New Yorker—still believed in magic. Both are professional dancers—seven-year veterans of the prestigious Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, which celebrated its 50th anniversary this year—and they recently became engaged. They don't draw distinctions between their roles as artists and as lovers, which, they say, makes both aspects of their lives all the more poignant.

"When people find out we dance together, live together and work together," Bowman explains, "they usually say, 'That must be hard. How do you find alone time?' But we wouldn't want it any other way. We love being able to be together all the time and experience each other in every single way."

If two people with less authenticity spoke in the same gushing manner, you'd wish them a speedy reality-check breakup and look forward to the schadenfreude. But they practice what they preach: "I've learned that what you put into anything is what you get back," says Jackson. And so their commitment—to dance, to each other and even to their raw-food diet—is extreme. That's because dancing professionally is so demanding: Ailey tours about nine months out of the year, making a relationship with an outsider difficult even under the best of circumstances. Not to mention, adds Bowman, "dancers are a different species."

They've known each other since high school, when Bowman commuted more than an hour from her Starrett City, Brooklyn, home to attend LaGuardia Arts. "Like *Fame*?" I ask. "Oh yes," she says, enthusing over the movie's influence on her, almost two decades later. "I used to watch Debbie Allen and cry. Of course, we didn't dance on the tables."

In a very *Fame*-like twist of fate, Bowman and Jackson both ended up auditioning for Ailey



the same year. Jackson was straight out of Juilliard, and Bowman had just finished two years at the North Carolina School of the Arts and another two dancing with the Donald Byrd Group. Auditions are annual, and the company is quite small—only 31 members—but both Jackson and Bowman were invited to join in June 2001. Bowman was their sole female admittee.

A self-described "hippie type," Bowman didn't really think much about marriage until Jackson surprised her with an engagement ring, featuring a raw diamond—an ode to both their lifestyle and their spirits—last December. "He says I'm a diamond in the rough," she laughs.

"She represents what being an artist can be," says Jackson of his bride-to-be, whom he will wed on Fire Island in June 2009.

When questioned about the storybook perfection of their relationship, Bowman responds: "I think these things are all just written already, and you can

"Every time I see her dance, it reminds me of how I want to be with her forever," says Jackson.

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either fight it or trust it. We're meant to be together, simply just as two human beings, with or without titles. Just like my relationship with dance, it's part of me from the inside, like my blood."

And as she turns to Jackson, smiles and laughs, I believe in magic again.

→ Want Julia to spy on your relationship? E-mail her at julia@timeoutny.com.

