

By: J.M. Banks

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K.C. native lands spot in prestigious N.Y. dance company

BY J.M. BANKS

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As De'Anthony Vaughan concludes another long day at dance rehearsal, he navigates his way through the bright lights, bustling crowds and honking horns of New York City. One thing is for sure, he is not on Vine Street anymore.

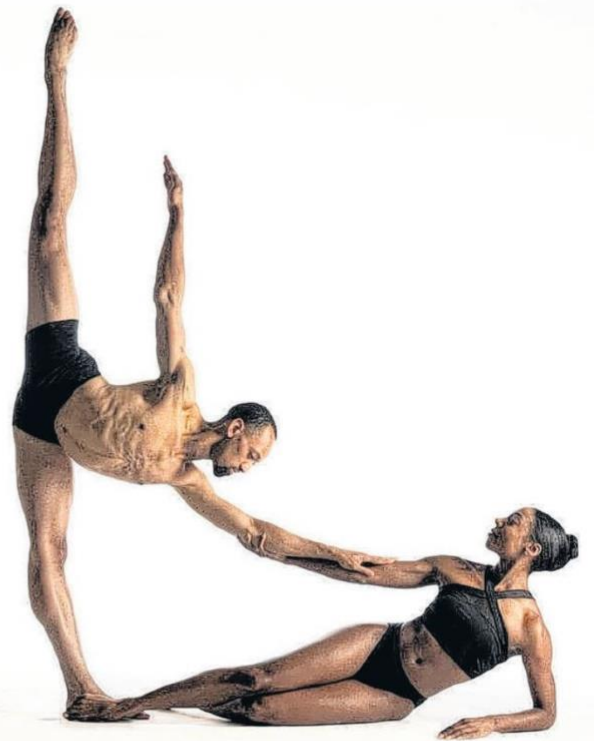
For many of us, working at our dream job is a far-off fantasy; for Vaughan, his lifelong ambition of becoming a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater became a reality earlier this month.

"I was ecstatic. I am still in

shock. I was overwhelmed, but I am still so happy," says Vaughan, a Kansas City native. "My family is more excited than me. I feel like I was still processing it and they were crying and happy because everyone knows it has always been a dream of mine."

Vaughan, 30, is a product of Kansas City's Friends of Alvin Ailey Youth Camp and a testament to the resources the year-round program provides. Now in its 39th year, the Friends of Alvin Ailey Foundation has been the second home for the prestigious dance company,

SEE VAUGHAN, 5A



KENT BAKER Kent Baker Studio

De'Anthony Vaughan performs a dance with Sierra Jones while dancing with the Dallas Black Dance Theatre.

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bridging the main organization in New York with Kansas City.

"Honestly, if it wasn't for them, I would not be where I am today," says Vaughan, who started taking dance courses with Alvin Ailey in middle school. "When I got to the program it introduced me to other styles and other males who are doing it, and it inspired me."

Encouraged by his grandmother to get involved with dance, Vaughan remembers how lonely it was as a boy. He credits the Ailey Youth Camp with putting him in front of men in the field who encouraged him.

"I have had some great teachers through my years at Alvin Ailey," says the

graduate of the now-closed Brookside-Frontier Math and Science School. "Growing up and being a male in the industry, there is not a lot of us and I had teachers who motivated me and saw that it was possible."

Vaughan attended the camp from 2007 to 2011. After graduating high school, he was accepted into the Alvin Ailey Summer Intensive Program, which allowed him to travel to New York for training the next four summers.

Vaughan has performed in the Dallas Black Dance Theatre for the last nine years. He entered the grueling audition process for Alvin Ailey's main company in March.

Hundreds of high-caliber dancers were given a ballet routine which they only had minutes to learn and perform in front of a panel of judges with no errors.

Vaughan learned in April that he was selected; however, he could only announce it this month. But it was tough for the dancer to keep tight-lipped.

Like other staff at the Friends of Alvin Ailey, Melanie Miller, chief executive officer, says Vaughan's selection into the main company is, of course, the best-case scenario. But that isn't the main goal.

"We don't always expect them all to go off to become world class dancers," says Miller. "It is always wonderful if they do, but what we are really trying to do is create good people who are responsi-

le and lead productive lives. And if they happen to fall in love with dance, that is just the cherry on top."

The foundation offers two youth camps: a six-week summer course and another from October to May. The goal is to use dance, music and creative writing to teach critical life skills.

The program is free for students living in the Kansas City and Kansas City, Kansas school district boundaries who are ages 11 to 14 and in fifth through eighth grades.

The camp provides resources, such as outfits, food and transportation to locations at Lincoln Middle School, 2012 E. 23rd St., and Carl B. Bruce Middle School, 2100 N. 18th St. in Kansas City, Kansas.

"Our mission is to make dance accessible to all, be

a presenter of dance in the community, teach art education for youth and diversity. Those are three things I am very passionate about," she says.

Miller has worked the past four years to promote the decades-old program but says it's a struggle to get youth, especially young boys, interested.

"We visit schools and go to community centers to meet people where they are at," she says. "We do have a small number of boys, and it has been really important for us to try to introduce dance to boys and to say it is OK to love dance and it is actually pretty cool."

Last year the camp introduced a Thursday dance course aimed at boys, teaching them the athletic intricacies of dance and how that carries over into sports, Miller said.

With next year marking the 40th anniversary for the Friends of Alvin Ailey, Miller believes success stories like Vaughan's will only help to convince more youth of the possibilities of a future in dance.

Vaughan is now preparing for a European tour. After years of hard work, discipline and countless nights of aching feet, he hopes the Kansas City dance scene will grow.

"It is all about staying focused and present," says Vaughan. "I feel like I did have a lot of teachers who made sure I knew what it took to get here, and if you work hard everything will follow."

For information on the programs, visit kcfaa.com/aileycamp.