Ailey's Ashley Kaylynn Green Never Settles for Less Than Authenticity

By: Courtney Celeste Fox
October 30, 2026



Onstage, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater standout Ashley Kaylynn Green is captivatingly contradictory. Her rock-solid technique is powerful yet subtle; her artistic approach blends curiosity and absolute dedication. "She dresses every movement with so much swag and style, physicality and grace, elegance and accessibility," says AAADT artistic director Alicia Graf Mack.

Informing Green's stage persona is a journey shaped by both confidence and sacrifice, which helped her forge a deep sense of self. Rather than chasing someone else's version of success, beauty, or artistry, she has remained committed to her own authentic vision. And that vision has helped solidify her voice as the company enters a new chapter under Graf Mack.

A Single-Minded Student

Green's training began in Charleston, South Carolina, at age 4, when her grandmother suggested she enroll in a local ballet class. Green enjoyed dance from the beginning, but she truly fell in love when she joined her studio's competition team at age 8, studying multiple styles and performing frequently. Another galvanizing moment was watching AAADT in her hometown as a 10-year-old. "I saw Matthew Rushing and Linda Celeste Sims perform 'Wade in the Water,' and Hope Boykin perform *A Case of You*," she says. "I immediately turned to my mom and said, 'I'm going to do that.' "



Unwavering determination became the foundation of her pursuit. Green and her mother found a studio called Columbia City Jazz (CCJ) Conservatory, owned by Dale Lam, that offered the type of rigorous training she needed. There was just one problem: The studio was located in Columbia, South Carolina, nearly two hours from their home. "My mom would pick me up from school every Thursday, drive two hours to the studio, drop me off with Ms. Lam to stay with her for the weekend, then drive the two hours back home," Green says. "She did that every single week." On Sundays, her mother would make the trip back to Columbia to pick her up so she could be back home in time for school on Monday.

Lam immediately recognized that Green possessed something rare. "She was bright and picked things up incredibly quickly," Lam says. "She was hyperfocused on the details and had an old soul that made her dancing feel so mature." And for Green, Lam's influence extended far beyond technical training. "She was the ignition for me to believe I could really do this," Green says. "She opened my mind to the possibilities."

Despite the demands of her training and travel schedule, Green says she never felt burned out. "Nothing else in my life made me feel the way dance did," she says. "I wanted to dedicate my life to something I could truly be proud of."

Finding Her Professional Footing

Green continued her training at Point Park University, where she learned more about the professional dance industry.



Upon graduating, she was only able to audition for two companies before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. One of them was Seattle's Whim W'Him, directed by Olivier Wevers, who offered her a contract just before shutdowns began in 2020. Four months later, Green moved to Seattle. The company mounted a digital season that year, but she didn't get to perform onstage with Whim W'Him until 2021.

Green danced with the company for just under two years. Despite the pandemic-related challenges, she describes it as a period of deep, meaningful artistic growth.

“It was the first time I got to actually tap into who I was as an artist,” Green shares. “We had so much freedom to play, and it helped me develop my voice.”

Wevers says he seeks out curious dancers who feel comfortable taking risks—and in Green, he found a dream collaborator. “What I admire most is that Ashley never settles,” he says. “Her movement has strength without force, vulnerability without fragility, and confidence without ego.” Wevers nominated Green for a Princess Grace Award, which she received in 2021, and remained a steadfast supporter as she entered the next chapter of her career.



Ascendant at Ailey

In 2021, Green joined AAADT, then under the direction of Robert Battle. It was a full-circle moment—the realization of her 10-year-old-self’s dream. Green quickly became one of Ailey’s most captivating performers, thanks to her command of multiple movement styles and her remarkable ability to embody the nuances of every choreographer’s voice.



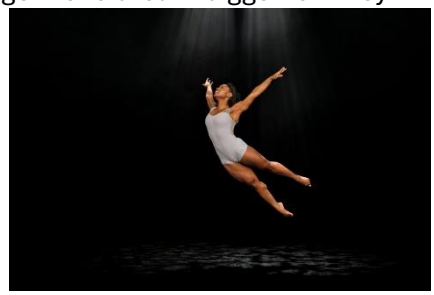
When approaching the Ailey classics that are staples of the company’s repertoire, Green’s dancing has a timeless quality, drawing the eye without distracting it. But she has a particular affinity for contemporary choreography. She speaks fondly of Kyle Abraham’s 2022 work *Are You in Your Feelings?,* describing the organic creative process as one of her favorite movement experiences. “No effort, just speaking,” she says.

Dancing Alonzo King’s *Following the Subtle Current Upstream* in 2023 was an even more surprising revelation. Working with King had always been a dream, but for years she assumed her shorter, more muscular build made it unlikely that she would be cast in his ballet-driven pieces. “I wasn’t tall and thin or what I thought a ballerina’s body should look like,” Green says, “but I knew I wanted to dance his work.” The moment she learned *Following the Subtle Current Upstream* was returning to the repertory, Green committed herself fully, taking every ballet class she could and preparing both physically and mentally. “That piece changed my perspective on my body and what technique means to me,” she says. “It made me realize that I could push myself to do anything.”

Green describes *Are You in Your Feelings?* and *Following the Subtle Current Upstream* as transformative. Working on them helped her both identify and hew to her artistic persona: They taught her, she says, to “express who you strive to be.”

When Graf Mack came on board as artistic director in 2025, she saw in Green both the personification of the signature Ailey aesthetic—technically virtuosic, artistically eloquent—and a glimpse of the company’s future. “What excites me most is that I genuinely don’t think we’ve seen the full scope of Ashley’s artistic potential,” Graf Mack says. “When I’m curating a season, I often find myself thinking about which ballets will stretch her, reveal something new in her, or open another door in her artistic journey. Artists like Ashley challenge me to dream bigger for Ailey.”

Moving Forward



Green’s own aspirations for the future are grounded in faith and gratitude. “I’ve always seen dance as bigger than myself. It’s a gift from God,” she says. “I have to think of it spiritually, and that releases all doubt and fear.” She can imagine endless possibilities, from choreographing new works to one day moving to Paris and building a life centered around creativity. Whatever path she chooses, it will be rooted in authenticity—the defining thread throughout her journey. “I’ve never wanted to match anybody,” Green says. “And that has always been the most impactful.”

What is Green’s impact? Mentors from each stage of her artistic life describe it as leaving spaces better than she found them. Lam credits Green with giving her a renewed sense of purpose. Wevers describes Green as an exceptional collaborator. And Graf Mack perhaps sums it up best: “I’ve heard so many young dancers say, ‘One day, I want to dance like Ashley Green.’ My response is always the same: ‘Me too.’ ”