Defender

Game Changers: Building Black Houston lifestyle, culture, entertainment

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Black creatives in Houston have long been the key that keeps the city vibrant, colorful, and entertaining. For the Defender's Game Changers series, we are focused on Houston talent who have made an impact in the arts, culture, and entertainment space. They talked about the paths that shaped them, what Houston means to their work, the impact they are proudest of, what they are building now, and the advice they would give young Black Houstonians still finding their way.
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Isabel Wallace-Green

More than 20 years ago, Isabel Wallace-Green sat in Jones Hall and watched Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform. Today, when Ailey tours to Houston, she is the one on that stage. Her parents, both artists and educators, filled her childhood with art.



"My earliest memories of home are colored with in-house art displays and family outings to art exhibitions, live theater, and dance performances," she said. "Creativity was a constant thread in the fabric of my upbringing."

She spent nearly a decade training in ballet at Houston Ballet Academy. At St. John's School, she fell in love with musical theater and what she called "the unique power of fusing dance, vocals, and drama." She went on to earn a double major in dance and African and African American studies through Fordham University and The Ailey School.

Her career has taken her from the ensemble of the Radio City Christmas Spectacular to Dallas Black Dance Theatre to dance faculty posts at several studios. She is now in her fourth season with Ailey, touring nationally and internationally.



She credits Houston, from the Theater District and Museum District to the Heights and Third Ward, with showing her that a career in the arts was possible.

"When touring to Houston with Ailey, I perform at Jones Hall, which is where I first saw the company perform over 20 years ago," she said. "I've been a guest teacher in the same Houston Ballet studios that I spent hours rehearsing in as a child."

She wants to give back to the city that raised her.

"I didn't blow up because of Hollywood or the Big Apple. It was because of The H."
- Chinedu Ogu, comedian

"As a teacher, I look forward to providing hope and opportunity to the next generation of dancers," Wallace-Green said. "As a performer, I hope audiences access vulnerability, possibility, and community that stays with them beyond the walls of a theater."

Whether onstage, in a classroom, or coming back from major injuries, she hopes her journey inspires others to go after what they want. Fresh off a five-week international tour, she is preparing for a long holiday performance season.



“I love performing and consider it the greatest gift to do often,” she said. “Within performance, I’m currently working on releasing expectation and pressure.”

Her advice is to believe in yourself, even when your path looks different. She admits doubt still creeps in when she is surrounded by dancers whose bodies look different from hers.

“There is always someone who can do more than me. There is always someone who will dance differently from me,” she said. “But that should not intimidate me. In fact, that’s the beauty of it!”

