



“Hell’s Kitchen is a Hub for Artists, So I Feel Right at Home” — Dancer Olivia Bowman-Jackson’s West Side Story

By Catie Savage
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Dancer and dance instructor Olivia Bowman-Jackson grew up in Brooklyn and travelled widely through her work — but now calls Manhattan Plaza home. This is Olivia’s West Side Story.

Olivia Bowman, a dancer and dance instructor, walking around her favorite places in Hell’s Kitchen, NYC.

So what’s your New York story? Born here, or just arrived?

I grew up in Brooklyn, in Starrett City — a true melting pot and a neighborhood that had everything within it: schools, banks, stores, restaurants, a community center, parks, and handball and basketball courts in every section. It really felt like its own little world.

What was your first job? What do you do now?

I started dancing in my mom’s womb to the rhythm of her typing at work (as she tells me), and I’ve been dancing ever since. I was a child actor on Sesame Street from pre-K through age 14, and danced with the National Dance Institute from ages 8-11 under the amazing artistic direction of Jacques D’Amboise. He even showed up to support me when I auditioned for LaGuardia High School of Performing Arts — my dream school — where I had the best of times and made lifelong friends.

My next dream was to become an Alvin Ailey dancer. I trained on scholarship daily after school, in the summers and then full-time after graduating from LaGuardia, which really shaped me as a dancer. I went on to study at the North Carolina School of the Arts and spent a summer with Dance Theatre of Harlem. Soon after, I was surprisingly accepted into Donald Byrd/The Group — initially auditioning just for The Harlem Nutcracker. I ended up dancing with the company for two years, refining my craft alongside incredible dancers and a brilliant choreographer.



I then auditioned for my dream company, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, under legendary Artistic Director Judith Jamison — and was shockingly accepted. I spent 10 years dancing around the world, experiencing it all alongside my now husband and best friend, Abdur-Rahim Jackson.



After that chapter, I became a certified Core Fusion Barre instructor at Exhale Mind Body Spa on Central Park South, while continuing to dance for recording artists including Gala, Alicia Keys, Taylor Dayne and Beyoncé. I also had the pleasure of being an original cast member of Queen of the Night at the Diamond Horseshoe (now Sony Hall).

My career continued to evolve — I taught fitness in the Hamptons, then lived in London where I performed with Rambert special events and Cirque du Soleil special events in Saudi Arabia. I became a certified personal trainer and Pilates instructor, teaching at boutique studios in Notting Hill and Marylebone.

Eventually, my husband and I were lucky enough to move into Manhattan Plaza after 14 years on the waitlist. Today, I run my own virtual fitness platform, OLIVIA FITT, where I teach weekly small-group classes — including OLIVIA FITT-IZENS, a seated workout for seasoned fitness enthusiasts, and OLIVIA FITT Dance Cardio — along with private sessions. In person, I teach fitness, dance, and Pilates classes throughout NYC, including at Ailey Extension and Manhattan Plaza in Hell’s Kitchen and AVEA Pilates in Kips Bay.

What's your favorite New York minute (or moment) so far?

I love attending Daybreaker parties — early morning, sober raves that start with an hour-long yoga session and pop up in incredible locations across the city.

I've danced at 6am in Central Park, Rockefeller Center, The McKittrick Hotel, Xanadu Roller Arts, Othership, the William Vale rooftop, and even Top of the Rock — sometimes before the sun came up. The energy is always uplifting, with incredible DJs like Oveous and The Illustrious Blacks, performances from artists like Crystal Waters and Thorne Darrell, and inspiring speakers including Marianne Williamson.

Olivia Bowman-Jackson

I've made some really special friends through it, and always leave feeling refreshed and renewed — usually in full costume with glitter all over my face by 9am. It's very me.



Share with us why you love Hell's Kitchen

It's a hub for artists, so I feel right at home — especially living in the community at Manhattan Plaza. I'm surrounded by legendary, incredibly cool neighbors, and I feel blessed to know them. The stories I've heard — sometimes just sitting in the jacuzzi at the gym — are amazing, because so many of them have lived full lives in the arts.



It's also culturally eclectic and right in the middle of everything. I can hop on a Citi Bike and be anywhere in 15 minutes. I feel truly lucky to be here.

What's your superpower or hidden talent?

I'm mommy to a very special, sweet, funny, loving little dog named Starr Bowman-Jackson. She's teaching me how to give my full attention and focus to someone other than myself, which feels both rewarding and important. I'm so grateful for her and for Waggytail Rescue.

What else should we know about you?

I once had a small food business called LIV'S RAW LUVS, where I made raw, vegan wraps and soups tailored to clients' blood types. I actually won a grant to get it started. I'd cook early in the morning, deliver locally, and then head into a full day of rehearsals with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. It was a lot, but I loved it.

Olivia's Favorite Hell's Kitchen Places

Barking Dog — 329 W49th St (bw 8/9th Ave)

I love being able to bring my little fur baby Starr with me out to eat. This restaurant has a doggie menu, great service and fun doggie events.

[The Ailey Studios](#) — 405 W55th St (bw 9/10th Ave)

This was my home for 10 years while dancing with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in the early 2000s and again for the past six years as I've been teaching at Ailey Extension. I love teaching Pilates Fusion on Sundays at 11am. My students are of all ages and levels but are all so open and receptive to my unique style which combines Pilates, dance, yoga, mobility, stability, muscle activation and breath work. I have people in-studio and from all over the world online as well. Then I get to teach dance classes to the kids and teens. I love getting to help shape young dancers and share what I've learned throughout my journey as a performing artist.





Westerly Natural Market — 911 8th Ave (corner W54th St)

This is my favorite health food store in the city so I'm so happy to have it close to home. I've been going here for 26 years and will continue to go for their incredible organic produce, snacks, supplements and clean products.

Pure Paws Veterinary Care — 506 W42nd St (bw 10/11th Ave)

I'm so grateful to have a wonderful, knowledgeable, caring vet, Dr Liff, so close to home. My fur baby Starr gets so much love from everyone there when we go.

Snowflakes Spa on 10th Avenue — 606 10th Ave (bw W43/44 St)

This fairly new massage parlor right by my building couldn't be any better. Their practitioners do exquisite bodywork; it's sparkling clean and it stays open daily until 11pm. I often treat myself to a back massage and reflexology.

Senza Gluten by Jemiko — 626 10th Ave (bw W44/45th St)

A simple yet sophisticated intimate setting with the most delicious homemade Italian food — and everything is actually gluten free. My hubby and I save this spot for special occasions.

UT47 Kitchen — 683 9th Ave (corner W47th St)

This Korean Vegan restaurant and cafe is my go-to for yummy vegan breakfast, delectable matcha and cocktails with special ingredients like homemade candied ginger, my favorite. Mi-Young Yu, the owner, is an incredibly inspiring woman and entrepreneur who is also quite funny. She makes you feel like you're a guest in her home and it's very comfy, yummy and fun.



BEA — 403 W43rd St (bw 9/10th Ave)

This late night restaurant and bar makes specialty cocktails, has yummy bottomless brunch (if you choose) and lots of space for throwing parties — which I've done a few times.

Dot's Cafe — 515 W52nd St (bw 10/11th Ave)

This cute cafe next to the wonderful MCC Theater has incredible food (my fav is the avocado toast!) and a chill relaxed vibe.



Aqua Boil — 750 9th Ave (bw W50/51st St)

This restaurant has delicious catfish, Cajun fries, lobster mac and cheese and cocktails to-go, which I've packed for summer picnics in Central Park. The mango margarita has a real kick!

Taylor Dance West — 307 W38th St (bw 8/9th Ave)

I love teaching Functional Fitness classes on Wednesdays at 1pm at this beautiful new studio. It's home to the Paul Taylor Dance Company and offers a wide variety of dance and fitness classes.

Manhattan Plaza Health Club — 482 W43rd St (bw 9/10th Ave)

This place is well equipped with a huge pool, jacuzzi, sauna, gym and studio. I love taking the water aerobics classes and working out there. I also love teaching Dance Cardio every Monday night at 7pm. All the people that come to my classes are pretty awesome. Their energy always has me leaving feeling better than when I arrived. It's become a lovely community. People always stay and hang out after class.

You can follow Olivia on Instagram at @oliviabowmanjackson and check out her website. If you know someone who would make a great West Side Story (or you would like to nominate yourself), please fill in this form — [w42st.info/WSSnominations](https://www.instagram.com/w42st/p/DWgnQRqCnfa/).



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