

Blick

Geneva native dances for the world's most successful ensemble

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is considered one of the world's leading modern dance companies. Swiss dancer Caroline Dartey has been a member for five years. Now, for the first time, her tour is taking her to her home country: "A dream come true!"

By: Sandra Casalini

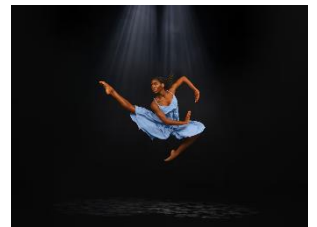
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Anyone who pictures a dancer as a small, delicate prima ballerina has never seen a performance by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The dancers are highly trained, top-level athletes who deliver Olympic-level performances during their nearly two-hour show. No wonder they are often called "artistic athletes"—especially since some of them have a background in sports.

Caroline Dartey is one such example. The 28-year-old from Geneva began rhythmic gymnastics at the age of four and is a two-time Swiss champion in her category. After ending her competitive sports career in her early teens, dancing was "the logical next step," says Caroline. She started at the Conservatoire Populaire de Musique, Danse et Théâtre in Geneva.

A beautiful, but also not entirely easy "transformation," as she calls it. "Everyone could see from my posture and movements that I came from sports and not art," she says with a laugh. "I had to change a lot, especially in my mind." But sports also gave her useful "tools" for a career as a professional dancer: discipline, willpower, technique, and a pursuit of perfection.



"I think that's what makes me the dancer I am today." Especially since Caroline Dartey quickly realizes that she doesn't miss the competitive environment at all. On the contrary: "Before competitions, I was always incredibly nervous. On stage, I'm much more relaxed."



Professional dancer instead of dentist

After graduating from high school, she went to New York at 18 to pursue dance. "I gave myself a year to see how far I could go." That one year turned into ten, and Caroline's alternative—studying dentistry—is definitely no longer an option. She secured a scholarship at the Ailey Dance School and, after completing her training, danced in the junior ensemble "Ailey II." Since 2021, she has been the only Swiss dancer and a permanent member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

The group, founded in 1958 as the first Black dance group in the USA, is now very diverse. A total of 32 members tour the world each autumn before their home performances in New York in the winter, followed by a US tour. The ensemble last performed in Switzerland eight years ago. "Since I joined, I've asked every year when we're performing in my hometown," says Caroline.



The moment has finally arrived: The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater is performing in Zurich. "I screamed with joy when I found out. I'm so excited!" says the woman from western Switzerland. The audience will include "everyone who can possibly make it: family, friends, people from kindergarten, and those from my old dance school. I'm so happy to finally be on stage in front of the people who have shaped me personally, athletically, and as a dancer."



Whether Caroline will have time for a trip to Geneva, she doesn't yet know. But if at all possible, a visit to her hometown is at the top of her wish list for this autumn. What does she miss most besides family and friends? "Lake Geneva." If all else fails, perhaps a walk along Lake Zurich will do before Caroline Dartey returns to the stage.

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre will be performing at Theater 11 in Zurich from September 23rd to 27th. Tickets are available [here](#).