

Nieuwsblad

Ashley Green, background dancer for Ariana Grande: “That time-out? I understand it all too well.”

Performing alongside world stars like Ariana Grande (33) and Cynthia Erivo (39)? For Ashley Green (28) this is no exception. She will soon be performing with the legendary American dance company Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at Vorst Nationaal. We met her in London for an exclusive interview.

By: Desna Lespinoy

September 21, 2026



Watch interview [here](#). Ashley Green is a bundle of muscle. The American from South Carolina has been part of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater for six years. Alvin Ailey's school, which became known as one of the first dance associations to give Black Americans a chance to perform, is a household name, especially in Anglo-Saxon regions. Although the troupe is gaining popularity here as well. “What characterizes Alvin Ailey? It is a mix of modern dance and ballet, initially designed to make African American bodies shine on stage,” says Ashley. Meanwhile, the company counts dancers of all backgrounds worldwide.

“I’m just warming up a bit before we start rehearsals,” she says when we meet her in a dance studio full of mirrors. “We have a whole series of shows here in London in a week, and then we’ll continue touring the rest of Europe.”

Calling

Ashley knew from a young age that dance was her calling. “As a little girl, I was already dancing all the time. But the real turning point came when I was 8. That’s when my mother took me to an Alvin Ailey performance. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I had never seen anything so captivating. It might sound bizarre, but I genuinely didn’t know that Black people had a presence on stage. From then on, I knew: this is going to be my future.”

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– Ashley Green, Professional dancer



To achieve that future, the African American worked hard. Within her family, she is the first to pursue such a big dream. “It took a lot out of me, because the bar is set high. At Alvin Ailey, hundreds of people audition. The chance of being chosen immediately is incredibly small. Still, I caught the judges' attention, and I was allowed to start immediately after my training. I haven't left since.”

Between the stars

Thanks to her career with the dance company, Ashley has already had the opportunity to perform with big stars. “A few years ago, our company performed with musical star Cynthia Erivo,” she says proudly. “She had just finished filming *Wicked* at the time. Cynthia is a wonderful person. We were there to support her act, but half the time she was asking what she could do for us (laughs) . I think she really enjoyed that performance.”



And Cynthia's co-star from *Wicked* , Ariana Grande, is no stranger to Ashley either. “I was lucky enough to dance for her during her last tour in the US,” Green explains. “An acquaintance of mine was on tour with her, and she was still looking for reinforcements for her background dancers. Then that friend sent over some of my demos, and Ariana wanted me to join the tour and dance in her music video. I was flown over and had to memorize the entire show choreography in three days. I ended up dancing twelve hours a day during the tour. The pace was high, but being able to work on such a big project is unique.”

Attention for everyone

Despite the high demands, the singer was always friendly, she emphasizes. “With Alvin Ailey, we dance for ourselves, but during a tour like this, you are dedicated to the artist. Fortunately,

Ariana is very sweet. She is a perfectionist, but she always gave feedback in a friendly manner. She was always polite. For instance, Ariana thanked everyone at the end of the day, even the cleaning crew.”

Ashley understands all too well that the singer and actress is taking a break. “The level and pace on a tour like that are simply very high. Moreover, many people underestimate what it is like to be constantly surrounded by people, yet still feel lonely. I notice that myself, for example, during life on tour. Fortunately, I take my Bible with me everywhere, and my faith helps me during difficult moments.”



Biggest supporters

Such a life on the road means Ashley sees her family very little. “I have understanding parents. They always believed in me and even come to watch my shows at Christmas,” the dancer says. “They are very proud of me. My mom had a large-format photo of me with Cynthia Erivo printed and hung it in her living room. And she plays the music video with Ariana on repeat whenever we have visitors. That way, everyone gets to see me at work without being asked (laughs) .”

From October 1 to October 4, the Alvin Ailey dance company American Dance Theater will perform in our country at Vorst Nationaal. Tickets are available via: stagemagic.be

