

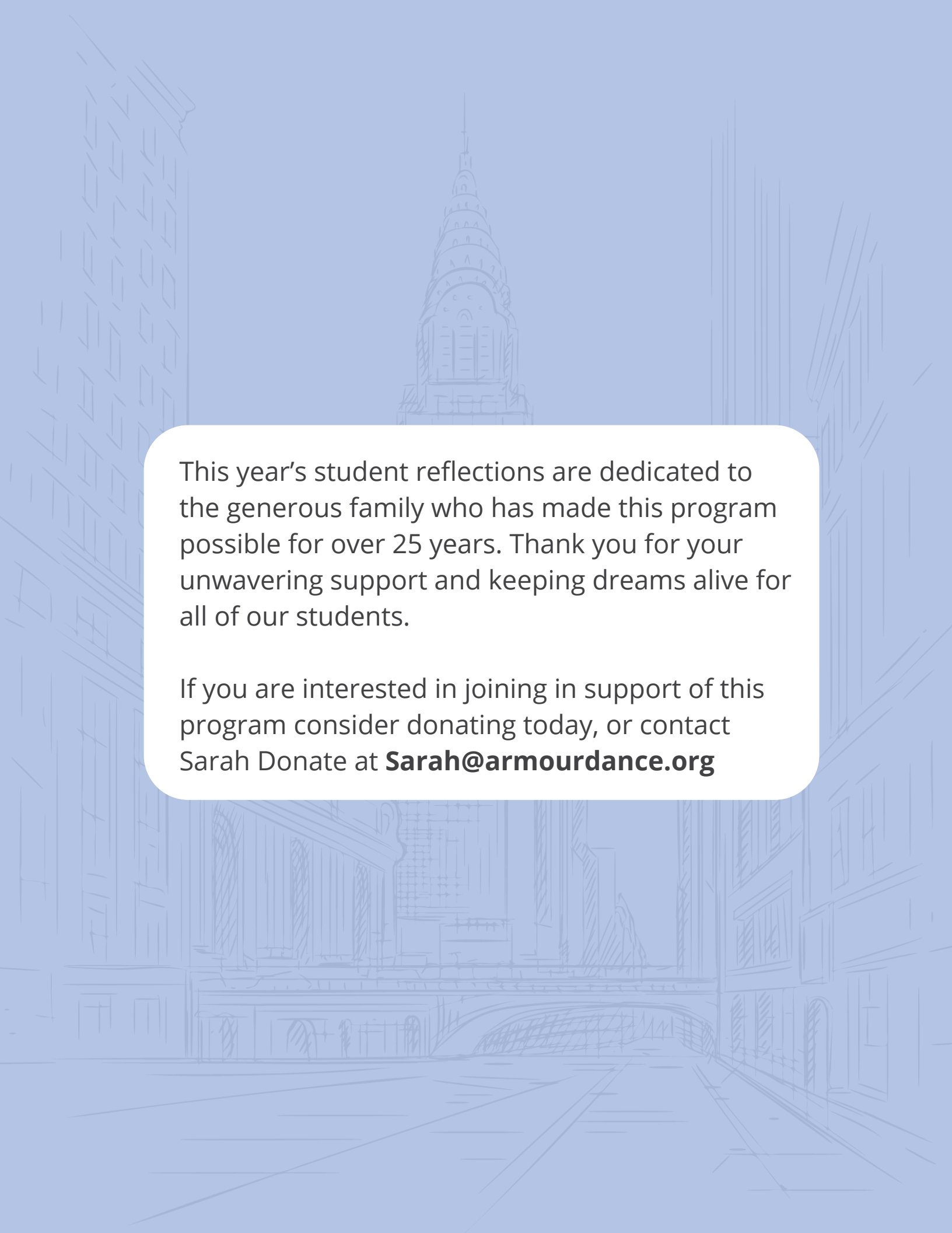


*Armour Dance Theatre's*

# **REFLECTIONS ON SUMMER IN NYC 2022**

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**|| ARMOUR DANCE THEATRE**



This year's student reflections are dedicated to the generous family who has made this program possible for over 25 years. Thank you for your unwavering support and keeping dreams alive for all of our students.

If you are interested in joining in support of this program consider donating today, or contact Sarah Donate at **[Sarah@armourdance.org](mailto:Sarah@armourdance.org)**





Every summer, Armour Dance theatre sends talented students who have been placed in professional dance intensives to New York City for up to eight weeks. This program is privately funded and covers the cost of chaperones, food, and board. This past summer, our students participated in programs with Alvin Ailey, American Dance Theater, Dance Theater of Harlem, Ballet Hispanico, Martha Graham School, and Steps on Broadway.

## IMPACT OF SUMMER IN NYC



For each student this program costs **\$750** per week or **\$6,000** for the entire summer.

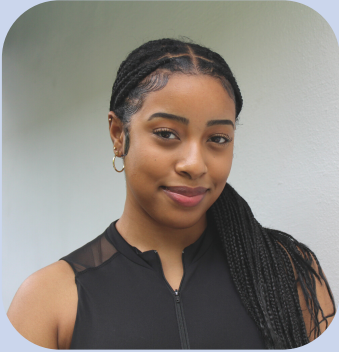


Since the inception of the Summer in New York program in 1989, **400** students have participated in this program .



Because of this program students have studied at programs such as American Ballet Theatre, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Joffrey Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, New York City Ballet, Martha Graham Dance Company, Ballet Hispanico, Ellison Ballet, and more!

— 2022 —  
SUMMER IN NEW YORK PARTICIPANTS



**KEIANA BRUNO**  
Dance Theatre of Harlem



**MARIANA CUBEROS**  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



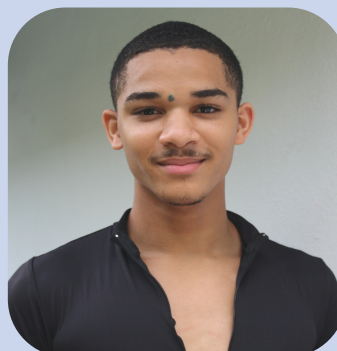
**SIENA DEVINE GUZMAN**  
Dance Theatre of Harlem



**EMILIA HAUS**  
Dance Theatre of Harlem



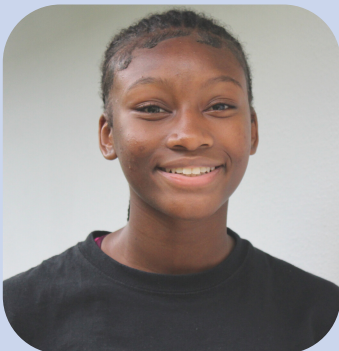
**GENESIS MADERA**  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



**JOHN MOBLEY**  
Dance Theatre of Harlem



**NINA NUÑEZ**  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



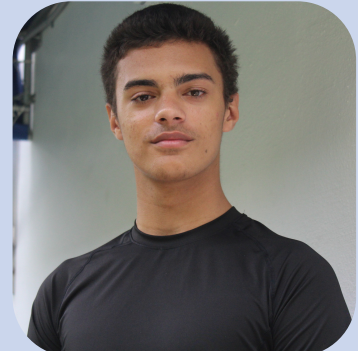
**SAVANNAH PEETS**  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



**JOHN NATHANIEL RAY JR.**  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



**THALIA SMITH**  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



**ALEXANDER SOKOLOV**  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



**LARISSA SOUKI**  
Ballet Hispanico



**MIRABLE TOSKOVIC**  
Ellison Ballet



**MARY WENZEL**  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater



## **Reflections from our Chaperone**

### **Laisha Despinosse-Bruno**

This experience is something nobody but life can prepare you for. This job title “chaperone” limits the reality of it; this position is so much more than that.

It's delicate, aggressive, polite and rude, sweet and sour. It puts you in a position that has life asking you to show the lessons you have learned with your time on this earth. As there are fourteen younger looking up at you in a city they have never been alone in to follow and chase their dreams. Now what do you tell your younger self that was brave enough to take the leap, and how would you guide her? This experience has taught me to respect courage, love, sweat, and tears at any age. Passion comes at any age, and it's to be respected as adults automatically expect a child to respect; it's to be expected to exchange respect to coexist and learn from each other. Your biggest lessons will be taught by someone younger than you.

My biggest focal point was to truly have them experience life in New York not only as New Yorkers but as themselves. Who are you really? Do you actually know what you like to do outside of dance? To take this time to truly be the person you always wanted to cause only then, walking in who you are will make you into the true adult you are meant to be. And let's always in everything, enjoy. This experience made me put my life lessons into action and pass on lessons to create experiences. In a way, life said show me. I'm truly grateful to have met and helped guide our future. Thank you sincerely

With Love,

- Laisha Despinosse-Bruno (Lala)

# SIENA DEVINE GUZMAN

After a long school year, I was looking forward to a summer of relaxation. What I got was the opposite, and I couldn't be happier.

The first time I visited New York, I was five years old, too dazed and oblivious to recall anything memorable. Now, at 14 going on 15, I feel like I've made up for lost time. Beginning with the taxi ride from LaGuardia Airport into the city, I was captivated. It was just past sundown, just dark enough to see the lights beginning to peek through the stillness of the night air. I was humming Frank Sinatra's timeless lyrics while gazing cinematically at the far-too-recognizable landmarks of the city. I had a feeling I was not in Kansas (Miami) anymore. When I stepped out of the car with my dauntingly heavy suitcase in hand, I felt like a true artist, who had made her inevitable pilgrimage to New York, in search of the impossible. When I was younger, I couldn't quite comprehend the appeal of the city. More than eight million people living in a 304 square-mile radius seemed unbearable. And it very well may be. But as soon as I realized I had to look beyond the tangible environment, everything clicked. New York City isn't beloved for dirty sidewalks, crowded streets, crazy people, or intimidating cost-of-living; New York City is beloved for the feeling it evokes. There's a reason the city is so magnetic to so many people. And after these three weeks, I'm starting to figure out what it is. The first day I arrived at the apartment, I tearfully said goodbye to my mom, and began to settle in with my roommates. I could already feel the

seed of homesickness planting itself in my stomach. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I tried to exist unassumingly in New York, but there is no such thing.

As I danced in my intensive throughout the first weeks, I had never felt so much payoff, so much progress so quickly. And while I missed my family in Miami, I couldn't help but revel in the newfound sense of independence only the big city can give you. New York has a way of making you feel like you can accomplish anything. As if out of all the little humans on the Earth, you're someone capable of really doing something with the life you've been given. As if all the billions of stars and galaxies and universes out there are holding their breath to see what you'll do next. You're surrounded by the bright lights—opportunity—a quintessential element of the city's atmosphere.

I even find myself looking forward to the mundane tasks that most people would find horribly tedious. There's nothing like waking up on a Saturday morning, trudging to the kitchen in my wrinkled pajamas, pouring a bowl of cereal, and distracting myself with the sights and sounds of the bustling city below. The cars honking at each other far too early, the oblivious birds chirping, regardless, jaywalkers with places to be, rusty fire escapes waiting for their moment to shine... all not-so-peacefully coexisting while I watched from a distance as a bystander to the beautiful chaos outside my window.



Later that day, my roommates and I packed up our dirty clothes, headed downstairs, and took the bus to the laundromat. We emerged on a colorful street filled with music, people, and laughter in the air. We spotted the laundromat and went in. The stuffy air inside was uncomfortable, encouraging us to quickly put our quarters in the machines and return when our clothes were clean. We headed into the bodega next door and bought some Arizona Iced Tea to enjoy outside. A band playing Latin music nearby made me nostalgic for the feel of Miami. We sat at a quaint little table with a game of chess all set up as if it had been waiting for us. And at that moment, I truly felt at home. I was enjoying the breeze, listening to the soft strum of an old guitar, in the company of my close friends, feeling truly grown-up in the big city. Nothing could have ruined that moment.

Spending this time with my roommates, adventuring the city with them, witnessing crazy moments, and making beautiful memories has made them feel like sisters to me. My time here has felt like a month-long sleepover. During the week we would come home and talk about our days at our dance intensives, sharing the little moments we wanted each other to know about, and on the weekends, we would explore the city together,

learning so much about what it means to be a New Yorker and seriously train to be a dancer away from home.

While New York may sometimes seem like a somewhat cutthroat place, where people only look out for themselves and step all over you to get what they desire, the sense of community I have felt here is like no other. Even as I walk the streets with strangers I will never know, it feels as though we have something in common. In New York, there is no place to hide. Everyone here knows that to make it, you have to learn to be comfortable with vulnerability. Being here has taught me to care less about the judgments people make about me and to concern myself more with what I set out to do.

Another quality I admire most about New Yorkers is their appreciation for art. Everywhere you go, you see someone dancing in the street, playing guitar in the subway, or even painting a masterpiece with crayons outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. You can tell that these artists—whether they perform for an adoring crowd every night or for the passengers on the A train—they love every second. I can't help but get a shiver down my spine when I applaud an outstanding performance on Broadway or when I witness a marvelous performance on the train ride home.





Everywhere I go in this city, I am reminded that beautiful moments are all around. The only thing we have to do is look for them. I believe that artists are the first ones to realize this truth. Musicians, painters, poets, playwrights, photographers, dancers...we are all trying to embody the feeling the city gives us. New York is the place for dreamers, and that's exactly why it's the place for me.

This experience was so much more than just enjoying the exciting atmosphere of the city. I got to live with 12 other girls, whom I am lucky enough to call my sisters after these three weeks, and there were fun, occasionally frustrating, but all-in-all unforgettable moments. This trip is something I will cherish for the rest of my life, and it wouldn't be possible without the generosity of our sponsors. Thank you endlessly for this memorable time.

- *Siena Devine Guzman*

# MIRABELLE TOSKOVIC



They say that New York is “the city that never sleeps.” I never knew the true meaning of that phrase until I came to New York. Being born and raised in Miami, I thought the “city life” was something I lived and breathed daily. New York has proven me wrong. It has given me a whole new definition of “city life.” This city has not only provided me with so many once-in-a-lifetime experiences, but it has also taught me so much.

Isn't it every little kid's dream to be able to explore New York City? Watching Kevin McCallister do it whilst fighting off Marv and Harry in Home Alone was something I watched on repeat growing up. Throughout my years in high school, I'd hear my friends talk about attending college in New York. They all wanted to move to New York. Now I know why. New York is a place like no other. The diversity of people here is remarkable. Walking down the streets of a busy city, no two people are

wearing the same thing, and no two buildings look alike. Everyone and everything has its unique style and its own special thing to contribute, which is what makes New York the amazing city that it is.

During my first week in the city, my friends and I made a plan. Every Friday, we would go and try a different type of cuisine. Our first stop was China Town. We decided to order some Chinese food. The portions were big, and they didn't disappoint. On our way back, we had the opportunity to pass through Little Italy. The sudden shift in buildings, shops, and even people caught me off guard. One minute I am in a town with Asian markets and restaurants trying to sell, and the next, I am surrounded by the smell of freshly baked pizza and Italian flags as far as the eye can see. The next week we decided to try Russian food. The portion sizes were small, but extremely flavor-filled and tasty. Croatian food was next up on the list. I was really looking forward to this cuisine since I am half-Croatian and love eating their food. We found a Croatian restaurant in Queens and took the subway to get there. The food was absolutely amazing and I enjoyed being able to share part of my heritage with my friends. I was even given the opportunity to practice my Croatian at the restaurant. As the weeks in New York pass by, different cuisines get checked off our list. Next up, we have Japanese food. This is just another example of the diversity that New York provides. So many cultural heritages can be found in this singular city, and it is astounding.



different cuisines get checked off our list. Next up, we have Japanese food. This is just another example of the diversity that New York provides. So many cultural heritages can be found in this singular city, and it is astounding.

In New York, my photo storage on my phone continuously diminishes. The number of pictures I've taken in this city is unimaginable. Another thing I did during my first week in New York was walk down the Hudson River along the Upper West Side. The view was something surreal, like it was fresh out of a painting. I was able to see Manhattan on the other side of the river, and it is an image that I will never forget. I can't forget to talk about the beautiful city parks. Central Park is a very well-known one, which I couldn't leave New York without visiting. Part of the park is right next to my dance intensive, so sometimes other dancers and I would eat lunch there. Every time we would go, the park is filled with people doing all sorts of things. Some of them eat, some take naps in the sun, and some even meditate and practice yoga. We love going there. Riverside Park is another beautiful park that is right across the street from our apartment. A July 4th picnic was organized there, and my friends and I were able to enjoy the outdoors and watch fireworks over the river. It was a truly unforgettable experience.

My photo gallery is not only filled with images of the lovely landscape but it is also filled with images of the activities that my roommates and I decided to take part in whilst here. We visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art not once but twice! The first time we went we were speechless when the price of admission was advertised as "Pay What You Can." We got multiple tickets to this famous art museum for only \$1. The affordability and the exhibits were so affordable that we had to come back. The next time we visited, we attended the MET's rooftop party. I was honestly blown away by the party, considering that an art museum threw it. I expected to see very few people at the party and expected to hear nothing but classical music. The party that we attended was quite the opposite. It was packed with people of all ages, all enjoying the rooftop views of New York and listening to modern music hits. We danced a little and then decided to head back to the apartment. On our way back, a dancer, who we later found out was attending the American Ballet Theatre summer intensive, was performing the Dying Swan variation outside of the MET museum. I loved watching her dance, especially since I share a passion for ballet.

I came to New York with the expectation that I would spend my summer days just dancing and doing chores in the apartment. What I've gotten from this entire New York experience is so much more. I, of course, spend a great deal of my time dancing at my summer intensives, which I love going to, but I've also gotten to spend some time exploring the city with my friends. For my first time being away from home for a prolonged period, I think I did pretty well. I have learned how to be independent, how to manage money for food and other necessities, how to keep a house and room clean, how to cook my meals, and how to live away from my family, all while still having fun. Dancing in a city that is always alive and breathing is just icing on top of the cake. Overall, my experience in New York has been nothing but positive. I look forward to the next time I can come and explore the "concrete jungle!"

- *Mirabelle Toskovic*

# JOHN NATHANIEL RAY JR.

My name is John N. Ray, and I have been chosen to stay with Mr. Darryl Quinton in Harlem, New York. Before I commence with any further words, I would like to make clear that this opportunity was presented to me by the wonderful Armour Dance Theatre. Before talking to Ms. Ruth about housing with Armour Dance Theatre's connections, my parents and I were at our wit's end trying to figure out where I was to stay for the upcoming six weeks that I had to be in New York, and like a perfectly timed clock we discovered Armour Dance Theatre. I am so glad that we followed up on this housing situation because I can genuinely say that I have been having the most amazing experience in New York. To begin, I can honestly say that I have cultivated a love for the guys I temporarily lived with.

Alexander Sokolov and John Mobley have become two of my very closest friends. And Darryl is like an uncle to me. I have shared plenty of laughs with them and beautiful moments that I would never undo. These memories and relationships are what say a lot about a person and will forever be engraved into my heart. A few days ago, I asked Darryl, "When I get back to Miami, and I randomly call you, are you going to answer?" and of course, he said, "Yes." It's funny to me how in a few days, the people you walk past in school halls can turn into your subway buddies whose sides you NEVER leave. We always have each other's backs up here, and no matter how we end up in Miami, I feel like that same energy will continue.

Next, I want to talk about my fantastic time at The Ailey School. I have seen a tremendous improvement in my technique, body awareness, and confidence as a dancer but, most importantly, in my passion. I've always been pretty wishy-washy about my future endeavors and if I wanted dance to be a part of that, but during my time at Ailey, I came to my senses and concluded that whatever I do, dance HAS to be a part of that.

In addition, I would like to talk about my experiences in the city. My time in New York was that of independence and punctuality. It dawned on me that I was not under the roof and the protection of my parents and that no one/nothing would slow down and wait for me. I had to get somewhere or miss it. It was difficult trying to navigate at first and keep an eye out for curfew, but at some point, I got it, and things became second nature. I could walk to the one train from 152nd street without a problem and explore different routes if the trains were down like it was innate. And that's the beauty of life in general. Sometimes things take a little time, but once you get it, you make it yours. I loved learning new things and exploring different parts of the city. New York is a beautiful state with a million other things to do, and experiencing those things made staying here worthwhile. We went shopping, skating, went to the Met, saw a ballerina perform on the street, and went to some exotic restaurants.



We tried different foods from different nations (like Russian, which I will say is very tasty). We did plenty of things that broadened our scope of the world. I could see myself living here and calling New York City my home one day. Being in the city made me realize how endless the possibilities are for me. The term "Reach for the stars" meant something when I could see the beautiful skyscrapers reaching for the stars. It made me realize that I could do great things if I matched my mind with my spirit. Our teachers would tell us that anyone can be talented, but what you do with talent makes a person stick out, and that applies to life. Everyone has something great in them, but it's up to that person to discover their greatness and manifest it in a way that'll do good to the people around them. So, I would like to say thank you so much for allowing me and so many other kids to realize that the sky is limitless and that we shouldn't use the word "can't" to define our possibilities because at the end of the day this world is what we make it.

- John Nathaniel Ray. Jr.

# LARISSA SOUKI

In the last few minutes of my first week at Ballet Hispánico, my stretch and conditioning teacher asked us to sit cross-legged, close our eyes, and reflect on our week and how we had grown. While she likely intended us to remember from a dancer's perspective what we had learned and how we had improved, I thought of how my worldview had widened so broadly in the five days I had been in the city.

Above all else, I learned to enjoy my own company. At home, I am perpetually surrounded by my loving and supremely involved family. While away from them, I was overcome with a sense of loneliness; it was difficult not to sit at the dinner table with my family daily. The feeling did not come from a lack of people in my immediate proximity: there were always people around. The loneliness stemmed from the seemingly sudden removal of my established support system that, just the previous week, had been around all of the time. It was not until Thursday of that first week when our group went to get Indian food in SoHo, that I correctly realized that these people I was now living with were my family. For the summer of 2022, all of us were experiencing new things in a new place, which was a profoundly unifying experience. We all had the same passion for dance and an openness to what the city would hold for us. So there, over saag paneer and vegetable samosas, I realized I was not as alone as I had grown to believe.

Another thing that struck me in the city was the multitude of cultures I was now enveloped by.

While I spoke to my parents on the phone in Spanish, another dancer spoke to her parents in Portuguese in the next room. I was dancing African dance forms in the morning and going out for authentic Indian food that same evening. Experiencing these new cultures in a meaningful way is a truly transformative experience: I will never forget the feeling of connecting with an array of world cultures from one city. I also found myself more deeply connected to my own Hispanic culture. At Ballet Hispánico, we study classical Spanish dance and salsa. Although my growing up was deeply influenced by Latin culture, my dance training always focused on classical concert dance. It feels only appropriate to be expanding my horizons in this beautiful city that proves to be so rich in cultural experiences.

Exploring the city outside my dance classes has proven to be supremely enriching. When I arrived, I did not know how open I would be to venturing into the city, preferring to remain focused on my dance training; it was, after all, the reason for my trip. However, walking the Highline proved to be one of the most incredible experiences of my entire life. In my 1.5-mile walk, I crossed paths with people from all walks of life and felt truly welcome in a city where I did not belong. It is an extraordinary sensation to be a tourist: one feels as though they are looking through a window pane trying to experience a city in total when they do not have any sense of





the reality of how the city operates in its day-to-day. But from the Highline, I felt we were all observers, looking on to the town from an elevated perspective. From there, no one is trying to fade into the town's daily operations; we are all looking on in absolute awe at the beauty of even the most commonplace of the city's features.

Above all else, I am enormously grateful for the opportunities this city has granted me in my short stay here. This summer has been genuinely formative, and I will reflect on it often. As I move forward into a hectic year of college applications and auditions, I know I will be back in New York. May my subsequent visits be lengthier than this summer's because this summer has proven to be the best of my life.

- Larissa Sourki

# JOHN MOBLEY

I boarded a Spirit flight from Fort Lauderdale Int'l airport to LaGuardia airport. It was a 3-hour flight and my first time flying. Honestly, my nerves were through the roof. This was my first time going to a place I know best as the Big Apple or better known as the city that never sleeps. The moment I stepped off the flight, I pulled my mask down to take in the aroma of New York, and as expected, it didn't smell the best.

Upon arrival at my new home for three weeks, I passed some places I would watch and dream about going to, such as Central Park, The Empire State Building, and some of the most iconic bridges. I was honestly in disbelief that I was allowed to be in a place I've been dreaming of going to since I was a child. Once I got to my apartment, I was greeted by Darryl Quinton. He made me feel very welcomed and at home, and I'm not even going to get started on his cooking. It was unbelievable and some of the best food I've had.

New York is known for having some of the best food from all over the world. While staying with Mr. Quinton, I've had some fantastic cooking, such as fried chicken strips, Mac and cheese, Spinach and feds kesh, and so much more. Every night was something new and delicious. I would also like to admit that I've never had an ice cream cake, and Mr. Quinton went out of his way to get not only one cake but two cookies and cream as well as the original flavor, and both were very delicious.

To move on to what I came to New York for dance training this summer, I took a three-week dance intensive at The Dance School of Harlem. The school was a rigorous training experience, but I genuinely believe it improved me as a dancer. I've had classes with some of the best such as Debra Austin, Robert Garland, and Augustus Van Heerden. They offered some of the best ballet training and pushed me more than I thought possible. All of the teachers helped me improve my ballet training. Some of the classes were easier than others. I took ballet barre to men's class, center ballet, jazz, modern, and terminology/history classes.

To conclude our summer intensive for three weeks, we put together a performance to show off each class what we learned. We had pieces from jazz-funk, mine, technique class, character class, and a finale ballet piece. I will say that I'm proud of myself. One fact is that I pushed myself, which let me get a center spot for a male part in the ballet piece. I executed a dance with grace and hit a clean triple pirouette.





I am genuinely grateful for the opportunity presented to me this summer to stay in housing without worrying about eating and having a roof over my head. I like to take a moment to talk about my last day in New York, which is very special to me. My mentor took me to the Empire State Building, where I saw breathtaking views from above and an incredible sunset. Then, I had one of the best cheesecake restaurants in New York, and we shared a red velvet cheesecake that was out of this world. I can't forget my dinner, however. We had some of the best tacos ever, and it was such a memorable night for me, and I'll never forget it. I'm glad that I had the opportunity to pursue my dream.

- John Mobley



# NICHOLE PEREZ



My trip to the big apple was highly anticipated during the year. Having ventured here before, I was ready to get the best training at the Graham School and other places like Ballet Arts and Steps on Broadway. However, nothing prepared me to confront the past version of myself with the woman I saw having a triumphant future.

Reflecting on my last experience in New York, nothing compared to the living experience I had on this trip. Not only did I stay five weeks longer, but I also enjoyed the company of my roommates in an apartment with charm and so much character. It was interesting to sleep amongst all the knowledge radiating from the books along the walls. This energy vibrated in our temporary home and inspired me to retain as much information as I could in dance. I even picked up reading! Anam Cara, a book of philosophy, poetry, and spirituality, helped deepen my soul and better helped me savor all my experiences in the City.

In light of this, I could completely disassociate from my daily routine and my familiar environment when I flew to New York. Acknowledging that love and loss is part of our human experience, it still was difficult at first to not ponder about these things at the dusk of day. Gratifying enough, each week further opened my mind and heart, making every day more memorable than the next. Besides the euphoria of dancing at the Graham School, my open heart attracted kind people in and outside of dance. Unfortunately, the necessity of love came last for me in Miami. She was one of hard work and solitude, which was justified by necessity and culture. However, I have learned in the span of a few weeks how to transfigure my loneliness by acknowledging strangers on the subway, sharing positive thoughts with students at the university across the street, and laughing with my roommates at the end of an exhausting day. I found love in many things in New York by enjoying; Korean barbeque with my sister, Swan Lake at the MET, oversized pizza, Smoke jazz club, Indian food at Panna, dancing with strangers at Cafe Du Soleil, hearing musicians, and bike riding in Central park, picnics with new friends,



watching fireworks through the skyscrapers, laundromat days, cooking with the roommates, sunbathing by like the plants in the kitchen window, watching movies with the girls in the apartment, Chelsea's Market, fresh markets on the streets, and an everyday favorite, Riverside park. The cumulative hours I spent walking, reading, and meditating at the park have grounded me significantly.

With all wonderful memories considered, many of which are not penned down, my void was filled, and my senses were awakened. I plan on utilizing my new approach to life with balance, appreciation, and love when I get home. As an artist, the trip has furthered my depth of character and knowledge in dance, that is crucial for the career ahead of me.

- Nichole Perez

# KEINA BRUNO

The school year brought many challenges but taught me lots of discipline in my dance. Even though summer is supposed to be a break, my love for dance always pushes me further. That said, it's every artist's hope to make it in the real world. New York City has been a goal I've aspired to reach since I was a little kid. This sponsorship from Armour Dance Theatre has been a dream come true, giving me this opportunity to learn the importance of being independent and self-sufficient and what it is like to be a dancer in New York.

The first week of being in New York was such a surreal experience. I couldn't get over the tall buildings and skyscrapers. I loved spending time with my friends in Times Square and talking about any and everything under the New York sun. I enjoyed every moment of it: taking the subway and walking everywhere I went because it was a refreshing change of scenery for me. During the week, I felt incredibly fatigued after a long day at my dance intensive, and the only thing I wanted to do was eat, sleep, and do it all over again. On the other hand, my friends and I would try different restaurants, see shows, take ferry rides, visit The Met, and much more during the weekend.

Although the purpose of this trip was to dance, another thing that I had to learn while being in New York was how to budget my money and my time. Even though the food was provided, there are many other expenses such as metro cards, laundry, tickets to activities, etc. It has taught me the discipline to acknowledge the reality that not every waking moment can be spent going out, enjoying a night out on the town, and accepting the fact that you be responsible and resourceful.

But, the time I did spend going out and enjoying a night on the town were truly unforgettable! My friends and I journeyed to Queens one night to try Croatian cuisine, and it was incredible. I had never tried anything like it, and we all really enjoyed ourselves. We went to an enormous bakery after that, and we all picked something we'd never tried before. A week or so later, all the girls in the apartment and our chaperone went out to dinner at Panna II, an Indian restaurant downtown. The decorations were all beautiful, and they had little flags hung from the ceiling with lovely colorful lights adorning the walls. We all enjoyed our food, and it was a perfect celebration for the end of my stay.



Living in an apartment with so many people has taught me to stay organized and clean, (if my mother hadn't taught me that already!) and to share my space. Many times while getting ready I had to give up the bathroom but all in the name of being a good roommate. The bond I created with the girls was unlike any other. There's a name for someone you live with, go everywhere with, and share everything with: a sister. Not only did I gain so much applicable knowledge of the real world here, but I gained 12 sisters.

Thank you to the sponsors of Armour Dance Theatre for giving me the opportunity to stay in New York City. This experience was truly incredible, and it wouldn't be possible without your generosity.

- Keina Bruno



# ALEXANDER SOKOLOV



When I was younger, I always thought about going to boarding school, a place where there were no parents, just friends, and nothing but my wits. You know, that sense of independence you experience at a young age. So moving into the apartment was something I was looking for but wasn't sure about. I didn't know what to expect because I had never lived with anyone outside of my family or even been to a sleepover. However, what made it a little more comfortable was that I was living with two of my friends from school, John Ray and John Mobley. Still, I didn't know what it was going to be like. I only knew what these guys were like during school, not at home, where they could be most comfortable. But I guess I was overreacting because they seemed to act like the same two friends I knew from school back in Miami. Knowing that they were getting comfortable allowed me to get comfortable. I didn't have to worry so much about impressing my roommates or committing to not getting on their nerves, which allowed me to be myself.

Several times, I went to different shops, restaurants, performances, and museums with my roommates. This was the point at which I started to feel like this was becoming an enjoyable summer so far. I also didn't know whether I would like the chaperone at all, including the idea that I would be living with a middle-aged stranger. But, things turned out great, better than I thought. The chaperone, Darryl, is one of the most fun guys I've ever met. He makes the funniest jokes, tells the best stories, and cooks the best food. That's my favorite part about the whole housing experience. This guy makes the best dinner daily! Above all that, some would say he became our friend. In my eyes, he was the coolest uncle ever. I have attended many dance programs in my life, and without a doubt, 'Alvin Ailey has become the most challenging one yet. Not a day went by where the teachers didn't work me to my limits, having me nearly create a puddle of sweat beneath my feet. It very quickly became the closest experience to what a professional company dancer's life was like. And believe me, I was so into it. I was taking six different classes, all with separate



teachers. Over time, it became hard to decide which class I enjoyed the most, but eventually, I picked 'Classical Ballet' and 'Musical Theatre' as my two favorites. They had us do a lot of fortifications and pre-planned combinations that consisted of large movements, intense jumps, and sometimes even partnering. But above all, they brought us together with other dancers around our age, who came from all over the country. Soon enough, they all became our friends. And that's when we started hanging out with some of them throughout the week. It just comes to show that not only has Ailey helped connect me with my goals as a passionate dancer, but also It's helped me connect with those with whom I danced.

I am grateful for the opportunity to dance in New York this summer. It has been a summer I will never forget.

- Alexander Sokolov

# SAVANNAH PEETS



After a long eventful year, I'm feeling tired but happy. I still couldn't stop thinking about this very moment when I got to take on New York City. I'm so grateful to have this opportunity to live in the Armour Dance Theatre sponsored apartment and to do what I love all summer. Not only is this opportunity covering the expenses of living in New York, but also giving me the chance to go out and experience new things. I am improving in my dancing, but I'm also learning independence and what it is to be a professional dancer.

My first week in New York has already been lots of fun. I had to learn how to ride the Subway to get to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and back. This also helped me when wanting to go to other places like performances and museums. Getting taught the difference between uptown and downtown helped me a lot especially when I almost got lost in New York. On the third day in the apartment, my amazing chaperone, Ms. Lala, took me out to my first ever Kiki ball. It was a great experience and super fun to do it with someone who shares the same interests as me.

While moving into my second week, the weekend was amazing to spend the fourth of July with new friends that I have made. Having the freedom to be independent on Independence Day was fun. As my friends from school started to come to New York, I started to enjoy the weekends even more. Even though I was exhausted from the schedule of my dance intensive on the weekend, I didn't miss the opportunity to explore the city.

During the second week I started to have more muscle aches and soreness everywhere. But, I know that the pain is temporary, and the progress I'm making is lasting. I also got used to the lifestyle of being in a fast-paced city and having to walk everywhere. As the weeks progressed, my friends were finally able to join me, and we got to experience more things together.

My time here has let me live the New York life but also taught me to budget and act responsibly with my money. This trip has also allowed me to become more mature and learn how to carry myself respectfully and dignifiedly.





To conclude, this trip to New York has been such an eye-opening experience for me. It's been amazing not only to improve my dancing but discover the renowned big city lifestyle I've always sought as an artist. The lessons I've learned here will last me a lifetime, and I'm excited to walk away from this experience having gained so much not only in dance but in life experiences.

- Savannah Peets

# THALIA SMITH

”

*My time in New York has been incredible. I've had a great time so far every day that I've been here. My dance classes at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater are all incredibly enjoyable, instructive, and challenging. Within my first three weeks here, I have forged many friendships and learned a great deal. I previously visited New York City, but none of those trips were as enjoyable as this one. With my roommates, I've already seen a wide variety of locations and witnessed a great deal. I'm having a wonderful time in New York City, and the fact that I can afford housing with ADT makes this experience possible.*

”

- Thalia Smith





# REBECCA CABEZAS

”

*I am so grateful to stay in this apartment with these girls who became my best friends. We learned so many skills not only from our dance intensives but also from living together. This trip created some of the best memories we have. This experience has created a bond between my friends that can't be compared to anything else me. From funny subway stories to making memories while cooking dinner together, we have become a family. These past weeks in New York were unforgettable. Thank you to this program's sponsors and Armour Dance for making this experience possible for me.*

”

*- Rebecca Cabezas*



# MARIANA CUBEROS

It has always been a dream of mine to come to New York and spend the summer dancing at a major dance company, but besides dancing, I've also been able to experience the scenery and culture in New York. I've also been able to get a glimpse into the lifestyle of an everyday New Yorker, from riding the crowded subways to walking in the busy streets to reach my destinations. I've also had the pleasure of staying with some of my school friends and meeting other girls that share my passions which have been an incredible experience getting to hear about their lives and interests. We've even had the opportunity to spend our nights, cook dinner together, and figure this New York thing out in general.

Exiting the plane at LaGuardia airport, excitement took over me, and I took in everything I saw to keep it in my memories. I remember struggling to find our Uber to make it to our apartment but still happy to be doing something new. The first weekend here, we visited places like Times Square, the Lincoln Center, and the Metropolitan Opera. Seeing American Ballet Theater's rendition of Swan Lake was magical; the building's architecture was also beautiful and left us in awe. It was indeed a unique experience seeing a live ballet in such a fantastic theater.

I also found interesting the "normal" things that would happen daily in New York that would never happen back home in Miami. All the different smells when walking the streets and all the people of the city just living their lives

pacing the sidewalks, and even the subway rats were a nice touch to the ambiance. I especially had fun during the 4th of July when we were walking around the city, and we ended up walking from Times Square to 5th avenue in search of an area to see the fireworks. During the subway ride to see the fireworks, we had the pleasure of being serenaded to the song "Stand by Me" by a man with my friends. This was just one of the many experiences I had when adventuring in New York City.

Staying in an apartment with around 11 girls was definitely a challenge. Having to schedule who would use the bathroom at what time, trying to decide what we all wanted to eat, trying to all make breakfast at the same time to leave on time for our respective classes. Although there were challenges, we did have times when we came together and cooked dinner for all the girls, and we made foods like rice, chicken, potatoes, and beans, even though it wasn't the same as when our moms would make them, they were still delicious and was a great bonding experience for us in the apartment. It was nice getting to know all the girls and getting to know their interests and what they wanted to achieve from their intensives. It was also fun constantly having someone to talk to at home, even right before we would go to bed, we would have endless conversations about anything and everything, and those are some of the memories I cherish most.





To conclude, this trip to New York has been such an eye-opening experience for me. It's been amazing not only to improve my dancing but discover the renowned big city lifestyle I've always sought as an artist. The lessons I've learned here will last me a lifetime, and I'm excited to walk away from this experience having gained so much not only in dance but in life experiences.

- *Mariana Cuberos*



# NINA NUÑEZ

” Spending the summer in the epicenter of dance has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Getting to experience New York City in full effect, training with some of the best teachers and faculty, learning how to live with ten other people, practicing and learning how to use the subway, and making memories that will last a lifetime. I have learned so much, and I will cherish these three weeks in the city forever.

- Nina Nuñez



# MARY WENZEL

”

*Coming to New York and dancing with my friends has been a dream come true. There are so many things and incredible experiences that New York has allowed us to live through. From learning how to live with 11 other girls to getting lost on the subway and ending up on the other side of New York. I am so grateful for this opportunity.*

”

*- Mary Wenzel*





# GENESIS MADERA

“Coming to New York for the summer and experiencing it was an eye opener not only for my dance career but for myself as a human and how I like to live my life. I'm still young and have time to grow, but I have learned so much about myself with this opportunity. I realized I enjoy a strict daily routine and the demands of being a professional dancer. It was a great experience. I am so thankful I was able to be housed this summer in New York City. I will remember it as an opportunity for the rest of my life.”

- Genesis Madera



# EMILIA HAUS

”

*Overall my experience was one of growth, learning, and pure happiness. I will never forget these three weeks and tell my future children of this time in my life. Not only was it the high of my summer, but I also spent a month doing my favorite thing in the world with my favorite people; what's better than that?*

”

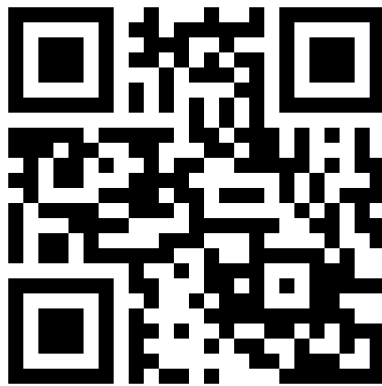
*- Emilia Haus*





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