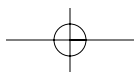
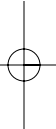
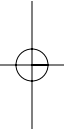


Sarah Lamb in costume
for Frederick Ashton's
Thais pas de deux



AN EXCEPTIONAL ARTIST

Sarah Lamb, principal at London's Royal Ballet, on working hard, striving for greatness and taking a demotion to get there

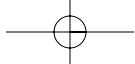
BY JOCELYN ANDERSON

ROYAL BALLET PRINCIPAL SARAH LAMB arrives at the *Pointe* cover shoot straight from the train station. She's come directly from Philadelphia, where the night before the company ended its summer tour. She's tired, but one can see that she also thrives on such a demanding schedule.

"It's all-consuming," Lamb says of her chosen path. "For a dancer, you're never really off dancing. It's your life. I think for anyone to be good at what he does, he has to make it his life."

So on one of her few Saturday afternoons off, she puts on the Aurora tutu she wore in Mexico City and the *Thais* pas de deux costume she donned in Guadalajara and transforms. In fact, at 27, Lamb may be more like ballerinas of the past than other dancers her age—she cultivates a certain level of mystique by keeping many details of her personal life secret—ethereal even in real life. Onstage, she is the epitome of classical elegance, inhabiting each role with strength and ease. It's obvious that she's found her place at The Royal Ballet, even though her move to that company in 2004 surprised many for its risk and timing.

Trained at the Boston Ballet School from the age of 6, Lamb quickly took to the art form for its challenge and the hard work it demanded. A self-described attention seeker, Lamb strived to be noticed. Her teacher at Boston Ballet School, Tatiana Legat, says, "At 12 years old, she already stood out in class, not just because of her technique, but because she already showed artistry." With Legat's help, Lamb studied the Russian style, developing strong and expressive limbs.



La Sylphide

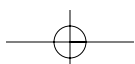


Coppélia

The Firebird



The Sleeping Beauty



“THERE’S ALWAYS GOING TO BE
SOMEONE WHO’S YOUNGER,
CAN DO MORE TURNS AND
JUMP HIGHER. THE EARLIER
YOU CAN ACCEPT THAT, THE
HAPPIER YOU CAN BE.”

—SARAH LAMB



Lamb says Legat taught her what it meant to be a true artist. “There’s always going to be someone who’s younger, can do more turns and jump higher and has nicer legs and feet,” says Lamb. “The earlier you can accept that, the happier you can be with the rest of your career, because you can try to appreciate what you can bring to the art form and hope that other people will appreciate what you can bring individually.”

In 1998, when she was 17, she joined Boston Ballet II—a necessary stepping stone, but admittedly difficult for someone so driven. “It was a lot slower, and you’re kind of at the bottom of the food chain,” Lamb says of the experience. She recalls a performance of *The Princess and the Pea* in which she was cast as a mattress, with a blanket attached to her wrists and ankles. “I thought, ‘I gave up college for this!’” says Lamb, who had deferred enrollment to Oberlin College. By the next year, she had joined Boston’s main company and danced Sugar Plum Fairy.

During down times, Lamb entered several ballet competitions, with Legat as her coach, to gain performance experience and learn how to deal with anxiety and pressure. She won silver medals at the International Ballet Competition in Nagoya, Japan, in 1999, the New York International Ballet Competition in 2000, and the U.S.A. International Ballet Competition in 2002.

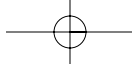
By 2003, she had been promoted to principal at Boston. She was already considering her next move. She says she was looking for a broader repertoire and that after Legat left the company, she didn’t feel she could get the coaching she needed. But when she was offered the position as first soloist at the Royal, taking a perceived demotion required some thought.

“It was hard,” she says. “I thought, ‘Am I ever going to get to this position again?’ And I felt I was going down a level, even though The Royal Ballet is a much bigger company.” An offer to become principal at the Dutch National Ballet didn’t make the decision any easier. Eventually, the Royal’s job security, additional performance opportunities and repertoire won out. A dual citizen, Lamb made the move to London.

Royal Ballet Director Monica Mason provided understanding and support. “I think the first year for any dancer coming from another company must be the hardest because it’s adapting to a new way of working,” Mason says. “Then she married, and her husband came to live in London, and that was a big change for her. But she was clearly intelligent, musical and interesting, and I felt this boded well.”

She started that first season with Frederick Ashton’s *Thais* pas de deux and finished it with Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake*. Soon after, she danced the Sylph in *La Sylphide*, Lise in *La Fille*

Performance photography by Bill Cooper



Jerome Robbins's
Afternoon of a Faun

“SARAH WILL PROBABLY
DANCE EVERY MAJOR ROLE
WE CAN THROW AT HER.
SHE SHOULD GO FROM
STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.”

—MONICA MASON
DIRECTOR,
THE ROYAL BALLET

mal gardée, Sugar Plum in *The Nutcracker* and Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*, among many other roles. Her intelligent approach to each role has been commended, as well as her ardent focus on artistry. Some contemporary works have also come her way, notably Wayne McGregor's *Chroma*, a smash success to be repeated this season.

Principal Viacheslav “Slava” Samodurov has been a frequent partner. “She is very light and a great turner, which makes my life much easier,” he says. “She gives everything to her rehearsals and even more for the performances. She is one of those people who repeats until she achieves perfection.”

Those who work with her can't help but notice this trait. “She's very goal-oriented,” says Legat, recalling a rehearsal in London where Lamb worked with one instructor and then with Legat, who was visiting, afterward. “Any other person would be happy to stop and just go, but no. She's very serious.”

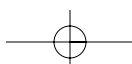
Adds Mason, “She's extremely focused. You don't ever get Sarah on a day off when she's fooling around. She doesn't fool around. She's right there, and you know for as long as she's going to dance, you'll get 100 percent from her.”

In 2006, all the effort paid off when Mason promoted her to principal dancer. As more lead roles come her way, her motivation remains the same: to always do better. “I am

always striving, and because I am now a principal that doesn't make me work any less or think I can sit on my laurels,” Lamb says. “Now I have even more to work on. I will always be learning. I will always want more. This is fulfilling for me, if I were to stop or think I have done enough I would feel dead.” For Lamb, ballet is art and that is inseparable from the rest of life.

This single-minded attitude has gotten her far, but Lamb is quick to point out that she also enjoys her work. There are days when she'll dance around her dressing room or in an elevator in front of strangers for the pure love of movement. And Samodurov says, “You can talk to her seriously, but she can still come off the leash from time to time and have a lot of fun.” For one thing, moving to Britain has been a great adventure—one that has been literally transformative. A British lilt now accents her American speech, and even Lamb admits that she “feels a little more British now.” When asked if she plans to dance stateside again, she jokes, “It would take a deal like David Beckham's. No, I think I'm here for the long haul.”

Carving out a spot in the company has certainly helped. “Sarah will probably dance every major role we can throw at her. She should go from strength to strength,” says Mason, who says she plans to cast her as Juliet this year and Manon the next. “So I think it's going to become more and more interesting for her now.” ■





Sarah Lamb; photo by Jayme Thornton