


Second To One



By Jocelyn Anderson

Take a test
run as a
professional
by dancing
in a second
company.

ABT Studio
Company
members
Sarawane
Tanatanit
and Brett
Van Sickle
in Jessica
Lang's *Six
To A Bunch*

Rosalie O'Connor

Misty Copeland started dancing at 13 (ancient in ballet years) with the seemingly impossible goal of joining American Ballet Theatre. Just six years later and now a member of her dream company, the 19-year-old knows exactly what helped her reach the top: She first danced with the ABT Studio Company, a troupe designed to develop talented dancers and feed them into the main company.

As a member of the studio company, Copeland apprenticed with the main company, danced roles like Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*, worked with emerging choreographers and toured. "When I was asked to join, I had never heard of it," Copeland says of the studio group. "But that year I got to see them and I was so impressed and excited, I would recommend it to anyone."

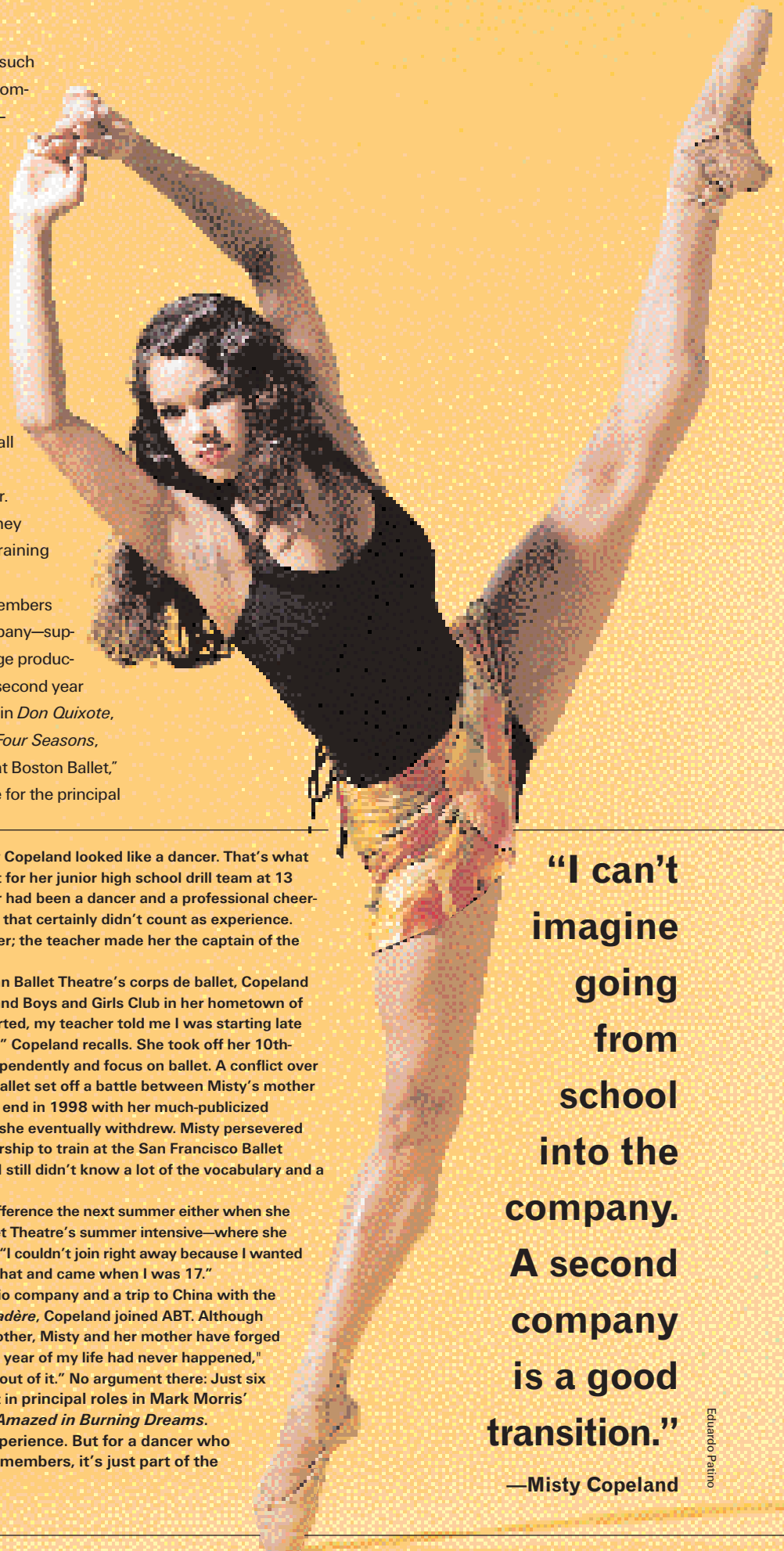
Actually, many ballet companies—including Boston Ballet, Colorado Ballet, Ballet Memphis and Dayton Ballet—have "second" or "junior" troupes that vary in size and purpose. Performance opportunities abound in second companies, where members also get chances to build experience, take company classes, make connections, develop camaraderie—and maybe get paid. The ABT Studio Company employs 12 dancers for eight months a year. Its members dance in about 15 to 25 full-evening performances a year.

"I think it's important at this point, because we are really a training company, to pay in to the bank rather than withdraw from the bank," says John Meehan, ABT Studio Company director.

"If we do too many performances, it's not such a positive thing." And it could thwart the company's efforts to advance dancers to ABT—something it does at about a 50 percent rate. In the last five years, 25 dancers have progressed to the main company. Principal Susan Jaffe danced with an early incarnation of the group.

Boston Ballet II boasts similar stats. Of the more than 40 dancers in Boston Ballet, 18 come from BBII. But that is not the only benefit of a second company. "Dancers can get a little more attention from the artistic staff, so they are not thrown into a full-company scenario with all the responsibilities," says Jorden Morris, chief ballet master and acting BBII director. "BBII is sort of the middle ground where they start to wean themselves away from the training atmosphere."

Unlike the ABT Studio Company, BBII members mostly act as apprentices to the main company—supplementing the corps de ballet in all the large productions and understudying roles. Now in her second year with BBII, Christina Pulcini, 18, has danced in *Don Quixote*, *Cleopatra*, *Theme and Variations* and *The Four Seasons*, among others. "There's a lot of inspiration at Boston Ballet," Pulcini says. "We see firsthand what it's like for the principal



Misty Water-Colored Memories

Even before she started dancing, Misty Copeland looked like a dancer. That's what her teacher told her when she tried out for her junior high school drill team at 13 with no dance background. Her mother had been a dancer and a professional cheerleader with the Kansas City Chiefs, but that certainly didn't count as experience. Turns out her inexperience didn't matter; the teacher made her the captain of the drill team.

Now a fast-rising member of American Ballet Theatre's corps de ballet, Copeland began taking classes at a local studio and Boys and Girls Club in her hometown of San Pedro, California. "When I first started, my teacher told me I was starting late and needed to catch up with everyone," Copeland recalls. She took off her 10th-grade year of high school to study independently and focus on ballet. A conflict over how much time she should devote to ballet set off a battle between Misty's mother and her ballet teacher—one that would end in 1998 with her much-publicized request for juvenile emancipation that she eventually withdrew. Misty persevered and that summer she won a full scholarship to train at the San Francisco Ballet School. "My first summer going away, I still didn't know a lot of the vocabulary and a lot of the steps," she says.

Starting late didn't seem to make a difference the next summer either when she won a full scholarship to American Ballet Theatre's summer intensive—where she was asked to join the second company. "I couldn't join right away because I wanted to finish high school at home. So I did that and came when I was 17."

After a successful year with the studio company and a trip to China with the main company to apprentice in *La Bayadère*, Copeland joined ABT. Although they are 3,000 miles away from each other, Misty and her mother have forged a close relationship. "I wish that whole year of my life had never happened," Copeland says, "but good things came out of it." No argument there: Just six months after joining ABT, she was cast in principal roles in Mark Morris' *Gong* and Kirk Peterson's revival of *Amazed in Burning Dreams*. "That was scary," she says of the experience. But for a dancer who cites all her favorite dancers as ABT members, it's just part of the excitement.

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—Misty Copeland

dancers, soloists and corps de ballet members. You will definitely know if you want to be in a company after spending a year or two here. You won't be caught off guard."

That's the goal at Dayton Ballet II as well. "It's an opportunity for the kids to realize what a career would be as a professional dancer and what we expect from them," says Karen Russo, co-director of DBII, which is split into two sections: a senior and a junior second company for dancers of different levels. The senior company takes in dance students from nearby Wright State University, and its members perform more often than those in the junior section, which includes dancers who are not yet on pointe.

With an emphasis on creating the well-rounded dancer, DBII supplements the company's corps de ballet and gives its own performance with a variety of styles at the end of the season. A recent program featured a Bob Fosse-inspired piece choreographed by co-director Gregory Robinson. "We encourage that because if you go out there with just one technique under your belt, you are limiting yourself," Russo says. "And if you choose to leave here and go to a different company, then you will have had that experience."

ABT's Meehan agrees. While the studio group performs in the main company's classical full-length ballets like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*, it also enlists choreographers like Stanton Welch, Robert Hill, Natalie Weir and Kirk Peterson to create original works.

At Colorado Ballet II, choreographers—especially members of the main company—are encouraged to bring their visions to life on the CBII dancers. "The second company was formed to showcase and give experience to apprentices and the upper-level students of the school, and also to develop new works," says CB Artistic Director Martin Fredmann. "It proved itself a couple

years ago when three of our dancers from Colorado Ballet created a *Carmina Burana* on the second company and it was so good and so effective that we took it into Colorado Ballet the following season."

Sometimes the work highlights future stars. Mira Allmeyer, 15, has used the last four years with CBII to strengthen her stage presence and acting abilities, most recently in solo roles in *The Nutcracker* and an original jazz piece. And, of course, the eyes are always set firmly on the prize. "I want to be in the company at Colorado Ballet," Allmeyer says.

Karl Condon, associate artistic director for Ballet Memphis, has set several pieces on the Ballet Memphis Junior Company. "As a choreographer, I can say that it does make for a fun creative process when you get to work with young kids on something totally off the wall," Condon says. "And certainly the cream rises to the top and you see the talented dancers."

Members of the Ballet Memphis Junior Company perform in the main company's yearly production of *The Nutcracker*, in addition to their own show each spring. Janet Parke, director of the Ballet Memphis Junior Company, says these performances accomplish a lot more than seasoning young dancers. "I always say that dancing in a company is about learning to dance, but it's also about discipline, commitment, setting goals and achieving them," Parke says. "The whole experience of being a dancer is far more than just movement."

There is also a certain amount of responsibility involved. Every year, the Ballet Memphis Junior Company dancers bring their ballets to outreach shows—festivals, benefits and charity events—something no second company member is a stranger to. As smaller companies, they can book

venues that may not be able to afford the main company or be large enough for a full-length ballet. The groups can also tour to cities that don't have large concert halls and participate in local school educational events.

CBII gives lecture/demonstrations around the Denver area. DBII provides a community service called the Muse Machine, in which junior members demonstrate barre exercises, answer questions and perform short pieces at area schools. BBII, in conjunction with the Massachusetts educational system, performs in schools as part of the Young Audience Program. This year, dancers will perform *Esmeralda Pas de Deux* and the Arabian variation from *The Nutcracker*. "It gets them learning how to prepare themselves through a rehearsal and performance and not onstage at the Wang Theatre where the pressure would be incredible," Jordan Morris says. "It's something a little bit easier to handle to start out with."

For the young dancer, a second company offers a chance to understand what it's like to join a company, complete with the hectic schedules and bouquets of flowers. Still, gaining membership can also be like joining a club. "We are not just looking for those students with talent; we are looking to give every child who wants to dance an opportunity to pursue that at his or her own level," says Parke. "That's not exactly the way the real ballet world operates." Members of the Ballet Memphis Junior Company will, however, be ready to join the real world when the time comes—and they audition for roles in *The Nutcracker* and pieces created by outside choreographers.

And while most second companies are looking for students with potential, all establish lasting camaraderie. "Everyone got so close that we became like brothers and sisters because there were only 12 members," Copeland says of her experience in the ABT Studio Company.

Now she sees many of them in the

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**—Christina Pulcini
Boston Ballet II**

Christina Pulcini and Andrea Schermoly as flowers in Boston Ballet’s *The Nutcracker*

Farnsworth/Black Photography



Catherine Stevens, Sarah Corlett and Melissa Weber of Dayton Ballet II

main company, where she has been since May. She joined just in time to feather up for *Swan Lake* at New York City's famed Metropolitan Opera House. "I can't imagine going from school into the company," Copeland admits. "It's such a big change that I think a lot of people can't handle it. So a second company is a good transition. It was a good year last year."

Getting Into Second

Landing that first job with a second company can boost your career.

American Ballet Theatre Studio Company

Ages: 16-21
12 dancers
Paid
How to get in: Draws from ABT's summer program, recommendations, people who come to take class or send videos

Ballet Memphis Junior Company

Ages: 10-18
50-60 dancers
Not paid
How to get in: Audition

Boston Ballet II

Ages: 18-22
11 dancers
Paid
How to get in: Auditions for the main company in Paris, San Francisco and Boston

Colorado Ballet II

Ages: 15-21
15 apprentices; 10 upper level students
Not paid
How to get in: Apprentices audition; students selected based on ability

Dayton Ballet II

Ages: 14+ (senior); 13 and younger (junior)
22 senior; 20 junior members
Not paid
How to get in: Audition **P**