

# Dancing Queen

THE CHARLOTTE BALLET'S RISING STAR SARAH LAPOINTE FINDS THAT CHASING HER DREAMS MEANS ALWAYS KEEPING ON HER TOES.

BY MICHAEL J. SOLENDER

**F**idget spinners were made for people like Sarah Lapointe.

"I can't ever sit still," she says. "I just have to be moving all the time."

Entering her third season with the Charlotte Ballet, the perpetually in motion LaPointe, 20, is as at home skimming her leg past her ear skyward as she is walking the runway at Charlotte Fashion Week or kayaking at the U.S. National Whitewater Center.

And it's that versatility that's helping make LaPointe a rising star locally and internationally.

At only 20 years old, LaPointe is one of the Charlotte Ballet's youngest dancers. But her skill level and stage presence defy her youth, and she's seen by many as a rising star in contemporary and classical dance. *Dance Magazine* placed her on their prestigious "25 to Watch" list last year—only the third time in the last decade that a Charlotte Ballet dancer has received the recognition. Dubbed a "prototypical ballerina," the magazine praised her magnetic talent, the "fluidity in her movement between steps," the "sense of grace in every unfolding arm movement," and her "delicate and perfectly placed fingers."

But marry LaPointe's ability to wow an in-person audience with her ability to capture the attention of thousands on social media and you've got a key player in the Charlotte Ballet's drive to strengthen its cultural position in the city, to build a brand and lead figures that are as recognizable in the community as they are on the stage.

## 'DANCE OR SKATING'

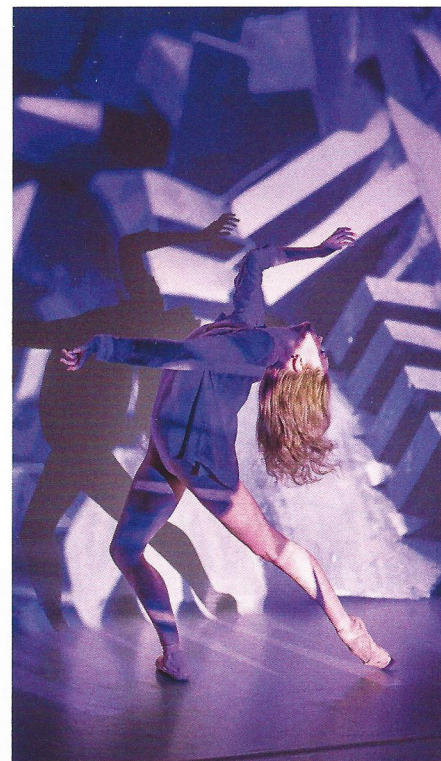
In a curious twist of fate, the ballerina might well be donning figure skates today instead of pointe shoes had her mother held a greater affinity for wintry weather.

"My mom put me in dance classes when I was 2," says Lapointe. "I'm an only child and she



PHOTO BY TODD ROSENBERG





wanted me to interact with other children my own age. It was either dance or skating. My mom went with ballet because she didn't want to sit in a cold ice rink."

But once she donned pointe shoes, it was obvious she was a natural. Lapointe graduated from Philadelphia's prestigious Rock School for Dance Education and was a winner of the 2015 National YoungArts Foundation Award. That same year she was a guest performer in the Washington Ballet's production of *Swan Lake*, sharing the stage with super-star ballerina Misty Copeland.

"I remember being inspired by her performance quality and the amount of energy and excitement that came out of her tiny, muscular body," says LaPointe.

Long, lean and athletic, Lapointe presents herself as much taller than her listed 5'9." Sometimes her height makes matching up with other dancers more difficult, but Lapointe has come to embrace her stature and recognizes that it comes with advantages.

"I love doing leg extensions," she says.

In her previous seasons here, Lapointe performed as the Lilac Fairy in Bonnefoux's *Sleeping Beauty*, the Sugar Plum Fairy and Rose in the *Nutcracker* and took a feature role in Ohad Naharin's *Minus 16*. She cites the "tall girl" in the *Rubies* movement of George Balanchine's *Jewels* as one of her favorites.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: PETER ZAY, TODD ROSENBERG, PETER ZAY





"Sarah is quite extraordinary in her physical abilities," says Hope Muir, Charlotte Ballet's newly placed artistic director. "She is very striking on stage with incredible theatrical power."

Dancer Josh Hall, one of LaPointe's colleagues, says she draws others' attention when she performs. "The way Sarah moves and how she uses her body is simply beautiful," Hall says. "She has that special *it* factor."

Glimmering in the virtual world as well as onstage, Lapointe has an enviable social media presence. She has more than 16,000 Instagram followers building her own personal brand and putting Charlotte Ballet in front of fans, potential students, dancers and audience members.

Lapointe's relationships with dancewear brands Zarely Wear, Discount Dance and Gaynor Minden have led to modeling and promotional opportunities. Sharp-eyed fashionistas may have recognized Lapointe as the lead runway model opening the 2016 Charlotte Seen Fashion Week.

## STAR POWER

Charlotte Ballet's "Be Transformed" tagline launching their 2017-18 season later

this month is an apt mantra for the company as it continues to strengthen its cultural position in the city, and dancers like Lapointe are critical to the broader mission.

Following its 2014 rebranding, changing names from the N.C. Dance Theatre to Charlotte Ballet, the organization is solidifying its place as a Charlotte arts stalwart, better marketing their smart mix of classical and contemporary ballet to a community enthralled by dance and becoming increasingly recognized outside of North Tryon Street.

Showcasing personalities and star-power of their dancers is one way the company is broadening its appeal.


"We're continuing to evolve and transform, growing and changing just as the city of Charlotte does," says Douglas Singleton, executive director of Charlotte Ballet. "Creating connections between audience members and performers shifts a performance from a passive experience to one where people root on their favorite dancers and celebrate their success. It's a wonderful way to engage."

Singleton noted Dancing with the Stars of Charlotte, an annual charity event pairing community leaders and Charlotte Ballet

dancers, is an example of making personal connections with the public. "It's a fun way for the community to get to know our dancers on a completely different level," Singleton says.

## OFF THE CLOCK

But after day-long rehearsals, talk of notes and corrections, and it's time to leave the studio, Lapointe revels in shifting gears, in being like her peers as she balances her career aspirations with the social life of a 20-something.

"I let go of everything and enjoy shifting gears at home with my friends," she says. "There's an amenity floor on the roof," she says, "and I love to hang out at the pool, grill out, enjoy the evening bonfires and be with other young professionals." 

## WANT TO SEE LAPOINTE IN ACTION?

Visit [charlotteballet.org](http://charlotteballet.org) for a full line up of performances, beginning Oct. 19 with "Fall Works" and ending March 9 with "The Most Incredible Thing."