

The London Ballet Circle

Laurette Summerscales
interviewed by
Laura Dodge

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Civil Service Club, SW1

A most enjoyable evening was summed up by this overheard remark: "What a delightful person, her mother must be so proud of her".

Laurette Summerscales began dancing at the age of 2 because her mother had her own dancing school and Laurette had no choice but to do modern, tap, ballet and singing even when she might have preferred to have riding lessons. At first she tried not to like ballet and found it hard but wanted to do it well. She said she was a late bloomer and although she entered competitions from the age of 7 she did not win anything until aged 13. There was no defining moment when she knew she wanted to be a ballet dancer although she had preferred ballet to musical theatre, partly because she did not think her singing was good enough. She also trained at another ballet school (Susan Robinson's). At 16 she successfully auditioned for a scholarship to a vocational school and was accepted at English National Ballet School which pleased her as it was still near to home and everyone there shared her passion for dance, unlike at her previous academic school.

Half way through her 2nd year, Wayne Eagling offered her a contract with English National Ballet and she was excited to be given parts in Giselle, The Snow Queen and The Nutcracker. Myrtha was the biggest role she had done and with only two day's notice, she performed her debut on the London Coliseum stage the day before her 19th birthday. It's a moment that she will never forget. She had learned a great deal from Wayne as his classes were 'super-hard' and he was not easy to please. When asked if she saw herself directing in the future Laurette was very clear that she felt a great responsibility in giving back into the profession which had given her so much and maybe this could be done through teaching. This she has been doing at her mother's school where she enjoys nurturing the 10 to 16 year olds and seeing them improve.

Laurette also has a high regard for Tamara Rojo who replaced Wayne as Artistic Director. (When interviewed for the LBC, Tamara also had a high regard for Laurette.) Laurette admires the fact that Tamara has a clear view for the company and that with her passion and determination she has really got the attention of the public and the dance world to see English National Ballet as a prestigious company.

Laura asked Laurette to talk about how she got her first big break with Tamara, being cast as the Lilac Fairy. Laurette had written a persuasive letter to Tamara enclosing a DVD. Tamara said she had enough work at the time but, undaunted, Laurette went to Lilac Fairy rehearsals and learnt the role. Daria Klimentova encouraged her just to get up and do it. It worked as Tamara then allowed her to perform it at many venues including the London Coliseum.

In 2013, Laurette had the thrill of dancing in Derek Deane's Swan Lake at the Royal Albert Hall which revealed her good technique and depth of feeling. This was quite a year for her – Lilac Fairy, Albert Hall, Beijing gold medal, ENB People's Choice Award and then 'the big jump' from Artist to First Soloist.

Laurette competed in ENB's Emerging Dancer twice, and returned in 2014 to perform the Manon bedroom pas de deux as a guest act. She found Beijing a stressful experience as she was pushed to extremes technically and artistically and she is not a great fan of international competitions because of the pressure. The positive side was to see where you are placed within a wider group of people which can make you a better dancer.

Laura asked her to name her favourite roles. Laurette loved dancing Odette/Odile because it is so demanding, but dancing any principal role has its challenges and it's that which stimulates her and fulfils her most. Laurette is really looking forward to the Modern Masters triple bill. She is performing Petite Mort and loves it because it is beautifully simple and musical. She likened In the Middle Somewhat Elevated, which she is also dancing, to Marmite, saying "you either love it or hate it". She absolutely loves it especially its energy. With regard to choosing any roles she'd love to dance, Laurette named Romeo and Juliet – Deane, Nureyev or Macmillan's choreography – and the Chosen One in Rite of Spring which she has learned but not yet danced. Laurette would actually like to dance every major role there is if she has the chance!

Questions from the audience:

Which dancers do you admire? Laurretta had earlier spoken of her love of Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse. She wished she had been born in that era. She also admires all the principals at ENB and would love to be like Darcey Bussell some day.

How do you cope with criticism? Laurretta said she is easily upset but also a strong person and tries to advise her pupils about emotional resilience when things get tough. She is aware of their different needs and tries to be encouraging as well as critical.

Who is your favourite partner? Laurretta's experience so far has been with different people. As Odile she felt secure with Arionel Vargas, and when she danced with Alejandro Virelles (who is new to the company), they were relaxed together and worked well as a team. She found Junor Souza 'superstrong' and tall, and Max Westwell is very reliable – "you know you can throw yourself into something and he will always be there". She would like to find out what it would be like to dance Coppelia with Yonah Acosta because they are both very feisty and energetic but she is taller en pointe. Laurretta also loved dancing Pas de Trois with Vadim Muntagirov in Suite En Blanc.

What are the highs and lows of touring? Her opinion is that "touring kills you"! Finding digs in England is difficult. When touring abroad it is easier because the accommodation is organised for dancers. Either way the company comes together like a family, which she loves.

How does Laurretta cope with the Christmas season at the Coliseum? Laurretta finds it a hard six weeks, emotionally draining and mentally tiring although the body is amazing and adapts to it.

What did you make of the TV series Agony and Ecstasy? "That was in 2011 and it was good to see how we came across. It was realistic."

Do you have favourite theatres when you tour? Laurretta likes Liverpool – in spite of difficulties with the lifts! – and Milton Keynes. ENB is taking Le Corsaire to the Paris Opera House soon with its vast stage, which she is very excited about.

Lauretta was thanked by Laura for being such delightful company. She also showed great self-awareness, empathy and kindness to fellow dancers as well as quiet determination. Above all, she showed tremendous loyalty and gratitude to all who had helped shape her career to date, not least her mother.

Report written by Jean Wilde

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