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Samantha's Final Bow

Longest Member of
ASFB Says Goodbye

BY CHRISTINE BENEDETTI,
TIME OUT STAFF WRITER



Photo courtesy: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

Samantha Klanac Campanile was just 19 when she first performed with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. She had never been west of Chicago, having grown up in Buffalo, N.Y., and came to Colorado for a summer-long audition with the Aspen-based company.

"I was cast in a ballet by Nicolo Fonte and that solidified that they had some faith in me," she says.

They — ASFB Executive Director Jean-Philippe Malaty and Artistic Director Tom Mossbrucker — were just six years into their roles at the helm of the company, and though they had a team of veteran dancers in place at the time, they probably didn't know when they brought on Klanac Campanile that she would essentially grow up with them to become the company's longest-tenured dancer in its history.

Fourteen years later, she's getting ready to take her final bow.

"At that point I didn't have a plan to say I'm going to dance with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet," she says. "And that kind of feels like the universe guided me and looking back on that I have to trust that again."

Klanac Campanile, 33, is retiring to embark on the next step in her life. Though intentionally vague about what that might entail — several opportunities have yet to solidify and she has her husband, Nick, of five years to consider — the decision is bittersweet.

"It's been my choice and I'm grateful for that, and a lot of dancers don't get to make the decision," she said recently after rehearsal at the Aspen District Theatre. "It's just emotional. It's challenging. But it feels right and it's time."

She came to ASFB from a dance conservatory outside of Manhattan. At the time, she was debating between going to a "normal college" or pursuing a full-time career in dance. Her father encouraged her



Photo courtesy: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

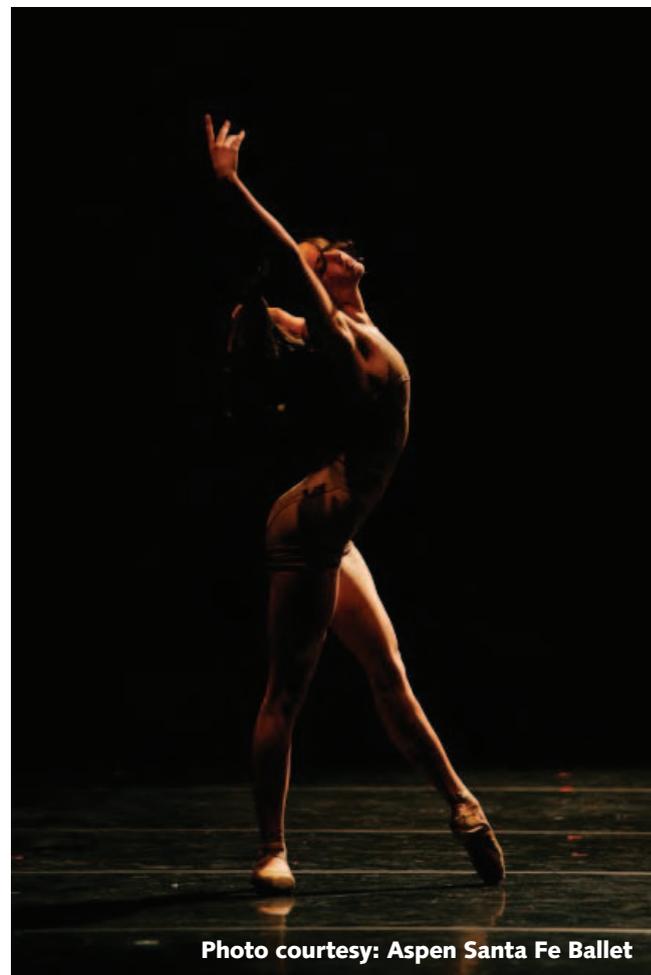


Photo courtesy: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

to take the leap into the dance world, and that path led her to Aspen.

During that inaugural year, her first tour was to Hawaii. ASFB also made its debut at the pillars of the East Coast ballet establishment: New York's Joyce Theatre and Massachusetts' Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. The company, which is built upon a hybrid business model split between its two namesake cities, presents both winter and summer seasons in its hometowns, but also tours extensively throughout the world. The nonprofit organization has built its reputation on presenting contemporary dance that's edgy and modern, while developing relationships with emerging choreographers to help meet that mission.

For example, Klanac Campanile's original dance in Nicolo Fonte's piece in 2002 would be the first of eight he would create for the organization. Most recently, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet presented Fonte's "The

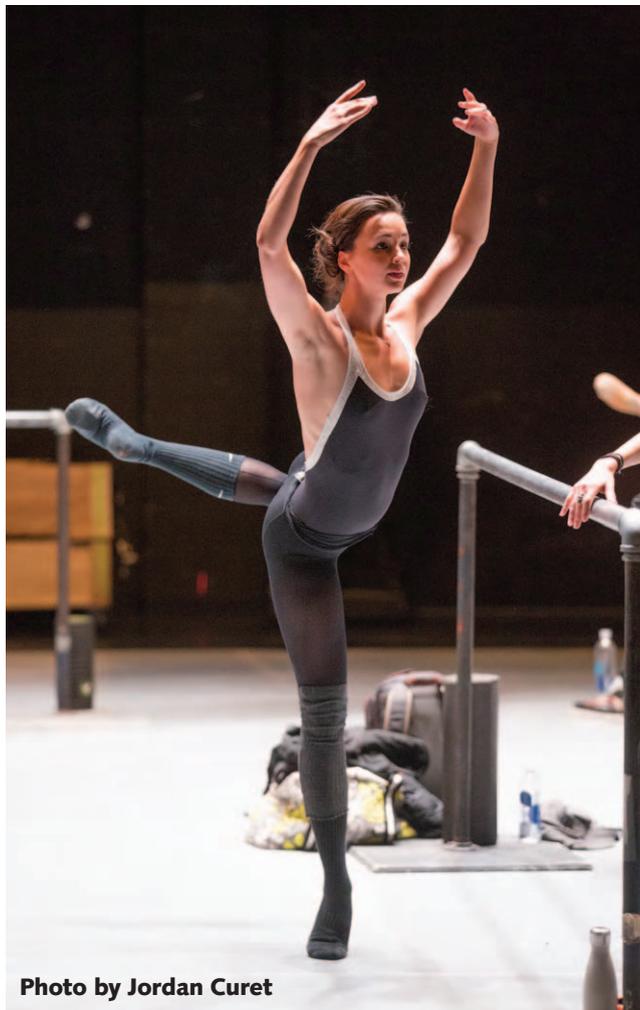


Photo by Jordan Curet

Heart(space)" this summer.

She says the relationships she's developed over the years — with choreographers, colleagues and her directors — will be among the things she misses the most.

"I think I'm nervous I'll miss performing because that's why I started dancing," she adds. "I love to connect with an audience on stage. There's an energy exchange that's really cool."

Her last dances in front of an Aspen audience are Tuesday, Aug. 16, and Saturday, Aug. 27. Aspen Santa Fe Ballet then travels to Louisiana and her final performance is Sept. 17 in Dallas.

"It's just getting more real now," she says, slightly emotionally. "I have a month left and it's important to be in the moment now and take this all in."

Though she may not have planned to spend nearly half of her life to date with the company when she joined it, she says the "incredible work" is why she stayed.

"Like anything, if you can still ask yourself are you growing as a person, then I think you're in the right place. It's always been like that for me here," she says. "I've never felt stifled professionally. The environment has been nurturing. So many ballet companies instill fear and negativity, and you know there are those days and it's natural and healthy to be nervous, but you get a better product the way we work. It's very positive."

The company is equally adoring of her.

"Samantha brought to ASFB an unusual combination of super-model looks paired with a powerhouse physicality," says Mossbrucker. "Both ethereal and athletic — serene, yet bursting with intensity. This rare duality made her a favorite with choreographers and audiences."

And it will undoubtedly help in whatever she does next. There are many things she's anticipating, among them are participating in activities that most Aspenites do regularly: skiing and biking.

"I've never skied in Aspen. You're dumb if you ski as a dancer," she says, hoping to take her first turns on Ajax this winter and to try road biking after the dance season ends.

But the most common question she gets is if she'll continue to dance.

Right now, the answer is no.

"I won't go to class the next week because then I probably shouldn't be retiring," she says.

Do, however, expect to see her stay connected with Aspen and the roots she's set down here.

"I don't know why I literally have gotten to live my dream," she says. "But I'm really thankful."

christine@aspendailynews.com



Photo courtesy: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet



Photo courtesy: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

Details

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet
 Tuesday, Aug. 16
 Farewell performance:
 Aug. 27
 8 p.m.
 Aspen District Theatre

Tickets: \$25-74
 aspenshowtix.com
 (970)920-5770
 Wheeler Box Office