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Reflecting on a 15-Year Career: Samantha Klanac Campanile to Retire from ASFB

by Jessica Moore

When you've spent half of your lifetime working closely with one company, the idea of moving on is intimidating at best. After 15 years with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, Samantha Klanac Campanile has the honor of being the most longstanding member of the group. She has wowed audiences on stages around the world, inspired leading choreographers to create new ballets on her, and set the bar for what makes an ASFB dancer. As the company celebrates its 20th anniversary, the time has also come for her to transition into another phase of her life. This summer's performances in Aspen and Santa Fe will be the last opportunity to see her perform on home stages.

As she trades in the bright lights and jet-setting ways of an ASFB company member for a more grounded, family-oriented lifestyle, Samantha reflects on what has been an incredible adventure. Read on to hear from Samantha in her own words.

On her career with ASFB...

I still remember my audition for the company in New York City like it was yesterday. A somewhat clueless 18-year-old, the world put me at the right place at the right time. I had a feeling that my life was about to change, but what I didn't realize was that Tom and Jean-Philippe would surpass every one of my dreams as a dancer. It is hard to fully express the gratitude I have for these talented, generous men who changed my life and opened up the world to me in a way I never thought possible.

I compartmentalize my time at ASFB into three generations. During the early years, the company was full of founding members and I was the baby learning the sheer pride, work ethic, loyalty, and joy that went into starting this company. The 'touring/growing' years, which I consider the bulk of my career, were a time of growth both for myself and for the company. In more recent years, I have become a senior member of the company. I thought this phase would be the least rewarding, however, it



PHOTO: ROSALE OCONNOR

has been beyond inspiring. The amount of talent that surrounds me as I leave this company is outstanding. It's comforting to know that I'm leaving as the group is stronger than ever.

On what brought her back year after year...

What's kept me motivated to keep dancing is that I've continued to feel artistically challenged and encouraged to grow and change. ASFB has a way of creating an accepting and honest environment for its dancers, which I believe is the biggest gift an artist can receive. I have a sense of pride and loyalty to the company because I truly believe in it. Tom, Jean-Philippe, the choreographers and teachers they invite, and every single one of my colleagues over the years have contributed to who I became as a dancer and, more importantly, who I am as a person.

My colleagues are my family. I feel that I have been through everything with some of the past and current company members. Early on, Ebs [Katherine Eberle Bolaños] and I sort of became that strong support system for one another. We lovingly refer to each other as 'work wives,' but she really is like a sister to me and has taught me what it means to be a good friend. The daily laughs, the hard work, the support, the advice, and even the tears, will be missed tremendously.

On finding the right time to retire...

I'm not sure there is ever a right time to end something that has brought you so much joy. It feels a little bit like ripping off a Band-Aid, but you just have to trust it will be ok and not leave a scar. In September my husband, Nick, and I will celebrate our five-year anniversary. Although Nick has always been a constant supporter of my career, the demands of dance have forced him to share me in some ways. We have hopes of starting a family and realistically, as a 33-year-old woman, there is a timeframe for doing that. Progressing in my personal life has been a major driving force

A Few of Her Favorite Things

With longevity in the company comes an extensive list of repertoire. Samantha has performed over 45 ballets with ASFB, 18 of which were created on her.

Favorite Ballets: *Huma Rojo* and *Uneven* by Cayetano Soto, *The Heart(s)pace* by Nicolo Fonte, *Sechs Tanze* by Jiri Kylian, *Petal* by Helen Pickett, *1st Flash* by Jorma Elo, *Like a Samba* by Trey McIntyre, *Sans Detour* by Dominique Dumais, *Life Forms* by Jacopo Godani, and *Chameleon* by Itzik Galili.

Favorite Role: I have fond memories of dancing "Girl from Ipanema" in *Like a Samba*. That music will always bring a smile to my face.

Favorite Choreographers: Nicolo Fonte (7 ballets), Cayetano Soto (5 ballets), and Jorma Elo (4 ballets).



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in prompting me to make the decision to retire. I'm very excited to enter a new phase of life with Nick, and I am so thankful he has had an opportunity to experience a part of me that I care about so deeply. We will both always look back to the ASFB years so fondly, but we're also delighted to see what is in store for us as a family. Lucky for me, Nick is also a pretty good dance partner, so if I can't be onstage anymore, at least I'll still have somebody to dance with, even if it's just in our kitchen.

On this summer's final performances...

I am so appreciative that I get to experience a 'final show' with the company in both Aspen and Santa Fe. We will be closing the program with *Huma Rojo* by Cayetano Soto, his most recent commission for ASFB's 20th anniversary celebration. I have always felt exceptionally connected to Cayetano's movement; his works have offered me tremendous fulfillment over the years and it makes me very happy to take my final bows with his work. *Huma Rojo* is one of my favorite ballets and I know it will become a classic for ASFB.

I'm also looking forward to early summer's Program A where we will perform Nicolo Fonte's *The Heart(s)pace*. My first ASFB-commissioned work I ever danced was a creation by Nicolo: *The Same Wall*, in 2002. I am forever grateful for Nicky, not just for his ballets, but for his friendship; he was instrumental to my joining ASFB in the first place, so if it weren't for him, I wouldn't be talking about my final performance right now! He has been a pillar for me throughout my career and I am grateful I still get to be a part of his works in my last summer. (And yes, Nicolo, you still make me nervous).

I am trying not to look at my final program as the pinnacle of my career, but instead as a celebration of the last 14 years with this organization and for all of those who have been a part of it. Although I am looking forward to it, I can also say it will be really tough for me to be on stage knowing it is the last time. If you are at that show, I apologize in advance for the tears; they are only out of gratitude for all that this company and this community has given me.

On future plans...

In the immediate future I am trying to embrace the fear of the unknown and allow myself to feel uncomfortable in the freedom. I have a few ideas and projects in the works that will allow me to maintain a presence in Aspen, and I am open to any new opportunities that may present themselves. Starting a family is a priority, however, I know I will need to have another creative outlet to feel personal fulfillment as well.

Being a part of ASFB is all I have ever known in my adult life, which makes it so hard to imagine future plans that don't involve this company. While there are many unknowns right now, I can confidently say that I plan to always stay connected to this company that I know and love so much. I find comfort and excitement in the thought of being in the audience for future performances and being ASFB's #1 fan as this company continues to grow and inspire.

Join us for Samantha's final performances at home with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet.

Aspen

August 27 | 8:00pm
Aspen District Theatre

Santa Fe

September 3 | 8:00pm
The Lensic, Santa Fe's Performing Arts Center



On the eve of Samantha Klanac Campanile's retirement, current and former members of the ASFB family have chimed in with their thoughts and well wishes.

Is there anyone more through-and-through beautiful than Samantha? She's got this stunning exterior physicality, and then within a minute of talking to her, one realizes that even her outer beauty pales in comparison to the soul contained within. It's like sunshine through gold when she dances, an inside-outside all-around grace. When Samantha's on stage I just can't watch anyone else.

- Brooke Klinger DelGrasso, former ASFB company member

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

- Tom Mossbrucker, ASFB Artistic Director

The first time I walked inside of the ballet studio at ASFB, I immediately spotted a beautiful young lady; her name was Samantha. Over the years, I've had the privilege to create some of my signature ballets for her. To describe her artistry is like describing an universe full of shining stars: she is one of a kind. Besides working with an incredible dancer, I have found a great friend as well. I will miss her dancing and if, one day, I walk into the ASFB studios and she is not in the company, I will close my eyes and remember everything she has given to me. I love you Sam and wish you all the best for your future.

- Cayetano Soto Ramirez, Choreographer

I will always think of *It's Not About the Numbers* when I think of Samantha onstage. As a dancer, you experience so many emotions while dancing, and to be able to share them with someone else is a gift to be cherished and remembered. I will always picture Samantha's beautiful face when we saw each other and smile at the memory of being with her, dancing together, feeling the elation and the exhaustion, and loving every second of it.

- Katie Dehler, former ASFB company member

Samantha is not only a talented, beautiful, and dedicated dancer, she is most importantly a wonderful person. Her energy is infectious, her smile is genuine, and her heart is pure. Thank you Samantha for all that you have shared with us.

- Seth DelGrasso, former ASFB company member

I am truly excited for Samantha as she transitions out of dance and into a new phase of her life. Samantha is a force, a presence on the stage that is not only honest and intoxicating, but has a freedom that I aspire to one day attain.

- Katherine Eberle Bolaños, ASFB company member

Since first meeting Samantha when she was a student at SUNY Purchase, I have watched her grow over the years and become an artist. She has danced every work of mine in the company since she joined and I have thoroughly enjoyed creating on her. Apart from the nitty gritty of collaborating with her on my ballets, I have also loved just spending time with her. She's smart and all around a lovely person and that translates in her dancing too. We have always had a lot of fun together in the studio. We laugh a lot while we're working and I tease her to death, but that really is a sign of the utmost respect and affection I have for her as a person and an artist. At this point I can't separate the two; she will always be seen in my eyes as this gorgeous creature that I was lucky enough to have helped push along just as much as she has inspired me over the years.

- Nicolo Fonte, Choreographer

Samantha I wish you would not retire yet, but I wish you all the best in whatever your heart is taking you. Thank you for being a bottomless well of joy of dance and having fun at work and still be really focused and get things done. Your joy and love of the process and life is so catchy, beautiful and inspiring, I thank you for letting me be part of that in creating all those ballets and just working together in the studio, will miss you very much.

- Jorma Elo, Choreographer