

# Swan Song

Dancer Samantha Klanac Campanile transitions to retirement

BY EMMALY WIEDERHOLT

**T**he career of a ballet dancer is notoriously short. In addition to injury, the demands of constant rehearsals and tours generally cause ballet dancers to hang up their shoes earlier than professionals in other dance forms.

Samantha Klanac Campanile is retiring from Aspen Santa Fe Ballet (ASFB) this fall after 15 seasons—a longer tenure than any other company member. Sept. 3 marks her final performance in Santa Fe, and Campanile describes the occasion as emotional and bittersweet. At only 33 years old, she isn't sure what her future holds, but says the timing feels right.

Campanile joined ASFB after completing her first year as an undergraduate dance major in 2002 at SUNY Purchase in New York. During her second semester as a freshman, she decided that if she wanted to dance professionally, she needed to begin auditioning. She met ASFB artistic director Tom Mossbrucker and its executive director, Jean-Philippe (JP) Malaty, at the Joffrey Ballet School in New York City. She had just turned 19, and had no previous professional experience, but they invited her to Aspen for the summer.

"I started very green; I didn't quite know what I was getting into," Campanile says. "I knew I liked dancing and performing—I've always loved the feeling of being onstage and connecting to an audience—but when I started with the company, I'd only ever worked with a handful of choreographers before. Learning to work with choreographers has been an area of growth; I've also learned so much from my colleagues and from Tom and JP. The way Tom takes the time to perfect little details is incredible. Even now, I'll crave a note from him because it helps me grow."

Of her 15 seasons at ASFB, Campanile says highlights have included performing at top venues such as New York City's Joyce Theater and the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, as well as appearing in *Return to a Strange Land* by Jiří Kylián, a Czech choreographer considered to be a master of contemporary ballet.

ROSALIE O'CONNOR



Samantha Klanac Campanile will soon leave the stage.

As much as Campanile has appreciated these opportunities, she has, by all accounts, equally been a joy to work with. "Samantha brought to ASFB an unusual combination of super-model looks paired with a powerhouse physicality," Mossbrucker tells SFR.

"Both ethereal and athletic, serene, yet bursting with intensity—this rare duality made her a favorite with choreographers and audiences."

Many ballet dancers work for more than one company during their careers, but Campanile chose to stay with ASFB because, she says, "Year after year, I evaluated and checked in with myself, and I always felt like I was still growing with the company and believed in the direction it was going. There's also something to be said for a little bit of stability in a dancer's life. If you're switching companies, contracts and cities, it can be a lot of added distraction from your art."

As for her decision to retire, Campanile cites her upcoming fifth wedding anniversary, and says she looks forward to investing more in her personal life and maybe starting a family. However, she isn't yet focused on a specific goal in the next phase of her life; rather, she wants to soak in the last moments of her identity as a performer.

"I really do feel fulfilled," she says. "So many dancers have to stop because of injury or their contract is not renewed. It's not always a dancer's choice. I've gotten to do over 40 ballets and be part of over 20 new creations. I feel like I can't ask for much more. For those reasons, it feels right and okay."

At the Lensic this Saturday, ASFB's Program B includes the company premiere of Kylián's *Sleepless* alongside Alejandro Cerrudo's *Silent Ghost* and *Huma Rojo* by Cayetano Soto. As for Campanile, she'll be drinking in everything she can: The sound of the curtain closing or the costumes freshly steamed and ready to go in the dressing room. "Fifteen years have gone by fast, and now, in my last performances, I can't help but try to take in every detail," she reflects. "I was so intent on my craft, I didn't always take everything in, but it's important to be present and appreciate the beauty happening around me." **SFR**

## ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET PROGRAM B

8 pm Saturday, Sep. 3. \$25-\$94. Lensic Performing Arts Center, 211 W San Francisco St. 988-1234

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