

Rising Star:

Whitney Jensen,

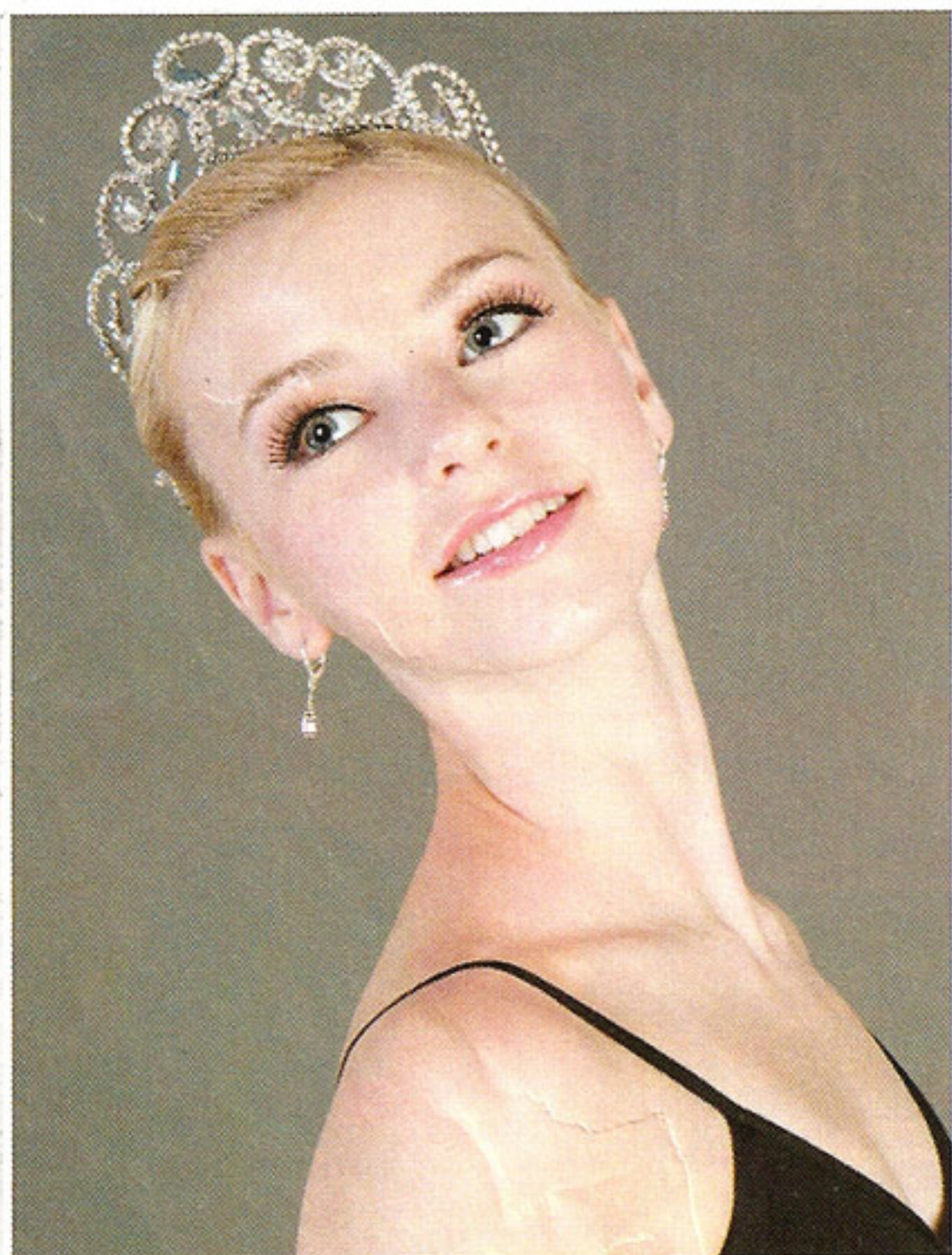
Prize Winner

By Marian Horosko



Jensen and Reyneris Reyes in "Pharaoh's Daughter"

What does it take to win at competitions? According to Valentina Kozlova, director of her Dance Conservatory of New York, it takes "discipline, consistency and strong motivation." Her student, Whitney Jensen, has all those qualities and has used them to lead her to the winners circle at every competition she has entered since she was ten years old.



Whitney Jensen

"I come from Utah, outside Salt Lake City," Whitney explains. "At six years-of-age, I took my first classes at my Mom's dance studio. Eventually, I studied at Ballet West, entered a competition, Youth America Dancing, and as a ten-year-old, won second place."

After a summer session at SAB, Whitney discovered Kozlova (formerly ballerina at the Bolshoi and NYCB) and her conservatory.

At thirteen, Whitney won the gold medal at the American Ballet Competition, where the teacher for the classes was Gilbert Mayer, of the Paris Opera School, who taught the French system. "I like to change techniques in order to learn other ways and styles. I don't feel intimidated," she says. At the age of fourteen, Whitney appeared at the Youth

America Grand Prix 2007 gala performance dancing with her partner, Reyneris Reyes of the Boston Ballet in a pas de deux from "Pharaoh's

Daughter," a classic of the Russian repertory. She won second place at YAGP to a children's ensemble from Mexico. Her poise and professional manner was noted in a *New York Times* review.

Whitney, now a tall, lean, blonde and fifteen years-old, without the distorted line of double-jointedness, lives in New York City with her sister, who is a singer, and starts her day at 6:30 a.m. at a class in scriptures at the Church of the Latter Day Saints at Lincoln Center. She attends school for academic studies and takes a daily ballet class at the Conservatory. Homework is included and a stint at the conservatory's reception desk as well. She keeps up with the dancers she has met at the various competitions and has always found them supportive.

According to Kozlova, "Whitney never misses a class - to the point where I once had to tell her not to take a class and rest instead. She is musical, responds immediately to a phrase, takes direction easily and instinctively understands the style and personality of the person she is creating. She is inherently artistic, a quick study and extremely talented. A good quality is her lack of resistance to a new way of doing something. She just does it joyfully."

"So many dancers," continues Kozlova, come on stage with wonderful bodies and strong technique, but they don't know who they are in a role, and why. Coaching is our greatest lack and it makes all the difference in the world. It's a separate talent from teaching."

Whitney's advice? "Find a teacher you trust and will follow, one who corrects you and whose advice is based on giving you a strong technique without rushing you before you are prepared. No one's perfect, but you have to keep trying to do everything perfectly. You can learn a lot from competition classes, and make new friends among the other contestants as well." ■