

DANCER SPOTLIGHT

# Delicate Dynamism

ABT corps member Katherine Williams discovers the joy in letting go onstage.

By Jennifer Stahl

**When American Ballet Theatre offered Katherine Williams** a place in its corps, she had no idea how big a transition lay ahead.

Williams' long line, liquid-smooth control and elegant port de bras had helped her advance quickly from student at the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School to ABT II member and, finally, into the company itself. But as many young professionals discover, the transition to company life can be jarring. "Being onstage is nothing like dancing in the studio," says Williams, who quickly realized that 180-degree turnout isn't enough to tug heartstrings in the audience. She had worked so hard to become technically polished that she found herself struggling to really *move* onstage.

Then came Paul Taylor's *Company B* last fall. Williams discovered her sense of freedom as she jitterbugged out of the wings of New York City Center—and shocked everyone watching. "This little waif of a thing really slammed it right down to the ground!" says Patrick Corbin, a former Paul Taylor Dance Company member who staged the piece for ABT. "Younger dancers are usually afraid to take

risks, but Katie took to it like a duck to water. She just dove into the jazzy idiom."

Barely a year into her career with the company, 19-year-old Williams is quickly learning to use her rock-solid technical foundation to deliver daring, dynamic performances. Corbin says, "Your eyes go straight to her onstage."

Williams followed her two sisters to ballet class at age 6. When the family moved from Hawaii to Maryland, her sisters quit, but Williams enrolled at the Ballet Royale Academy and began competing at Youth America Grand Prix. "It was an opportunity like no other to get my name out there and learn what other dancers my age were doing," says Williams. In 2003, she won the Youth Grand Prix. Two years later, she placed in the top 12 of the senior division and was offered a spot at JKO.

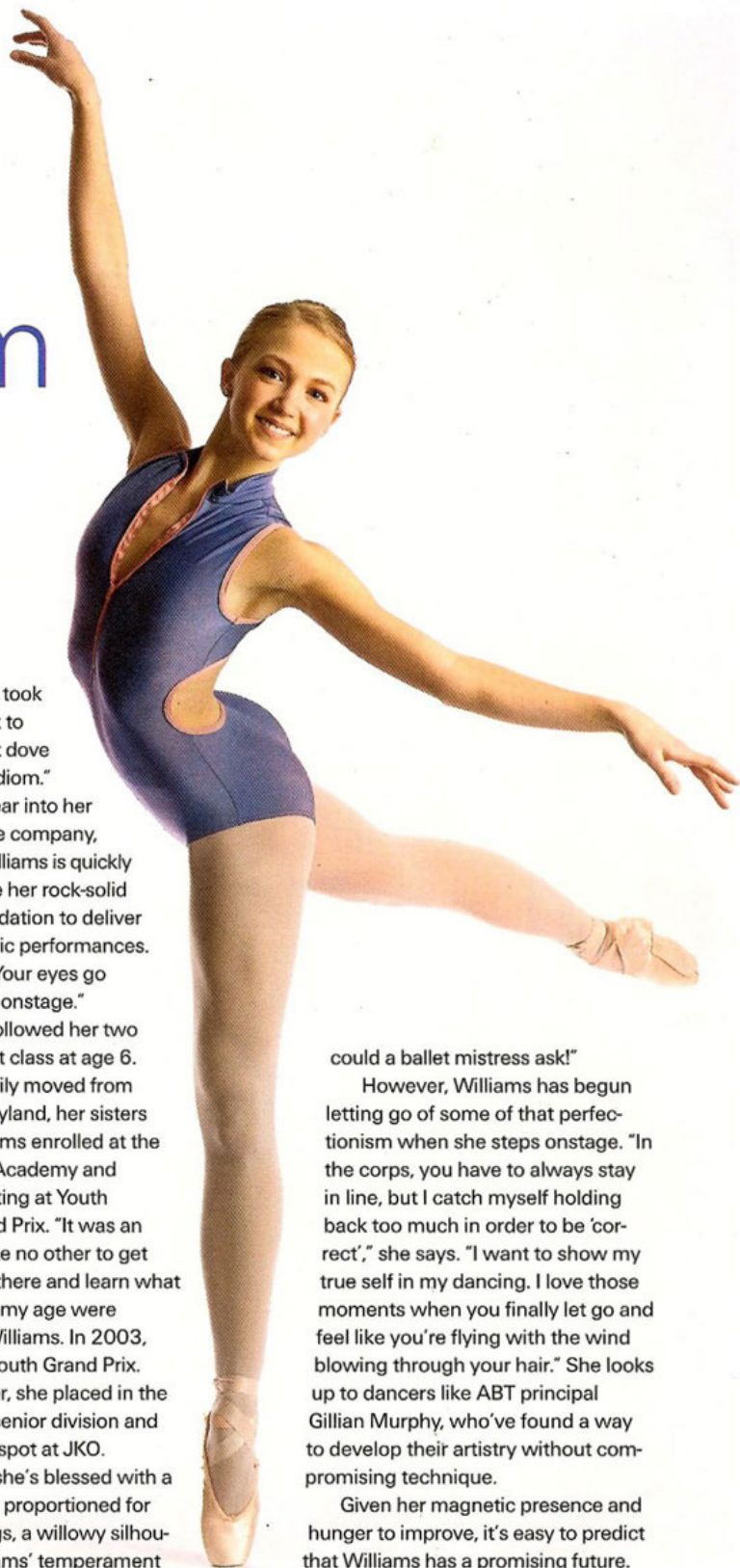
Although she's blessed with a body perfectly proportioned for ballet (long legs, a willowy silhouette), it's Williams' temperament that has been the not-so-secret ingredient of her success. "Katie is one of the most professional workers I've ever met by far," says ABT ballet mistress Susan Jones. Along with being a quick learner, Jones says Williams also applies every personal and general correction, always working at her fullest. "What more

could a ballet mistress ask!"

However, Williams has begun letting go of some of that perfectionism when she steps onstage. "In the corps, you have to always stay in line, but I catch myself holding back too much in order to be 'correct,'" she says. "I want to show my true self in my dancing. I love those moments when you finally let go and feel like you're flying with the wind blowing through your hair." She looks up to dancers like ABT principal Gillian Murphy, who've found a way to develop their artistry without compromising technique.

Given her magnetic presence and hunger to improve, it's easy to predict that Williams has a promising future. "She has definitely lost some of the schoolgirl look she had from the start," says Jones. "I see her improving with each season. Anything is possible when you have all the extraordinary talents that Katie has." □

Jennifer Stahl is Pointe's senior editor.



## at a glance

Name: Katherine Williams

Age: 19

Company: American Ballet Theatre

Training: Ballet Royale Academy, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School

Favorite Ballet Performed: *Company B*

Dream Role: Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*