



OREGON ARTSWATCH

OREGON'S ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

DANCE

Candace Bouchard: After one last Dewdrop, the world awaits

Oregon Ballet Theatre ballerina Candace Bouchard signs off with one last "Nutcracker"

DECEMBER 7, 2017 // DANCE // OREGON ARTSWATCH

By HEATHER WISNER

Candace Bouchard's last waltz with Oregon Ballet Theatre will be an actual waltz—specifically, the “Waltz of the Flowers” in *The Nutcracker*, which opens December 9 at the Keller Auditorium. After that, the 34-year-old soloist will retire from the only company she has ever called home—and from professional dance for the foreseeable future.

Bouchard will spend some of her last month onstage in one of her favorite roles, Dewdrop, the nimble solo central to “Waltz of the Flowers”; it comes with a dizzying turn sequence, plus consecutive jumps and pointe work that barely allow the dancer's feet to touch down before popping up again. It's a challenge, and Bouchard likes challenges, particularly when they involve athleticism and musicality, qualities viewers have come to enjoy in her dancing.

Walking away from a passion she has pursued since childhood, however, may be her biggest challenge yet.



Candace Bouchard in the company premiere of August Bournonville's "Napoli", 2015/Photo by James McGrew

“It's going to feel really weird to not say I'm a dancer,” Bouchard admits, “but I have a pretty robust life. I feel as ready now as I ever will.”

One recent night after *Nutcracker* rehearsals, Bouchard took a moment to reflect on where she's been, where she's headed next, and what it's been like to dance for a living.

A Dancer's Life

A native of St. Louis, Bouchard started dancing at age 5, training with St. Louis Ballet and Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet before making a pilgrimage at age 18 to dance mecca: New York City. When she wasn't studying at Ballet Academy East, she took advantage of the city's artistic riches. “I saw ABT, New York City Ballet,” she says. “It was nice to feel immersed in that culture for awhile.”

After two years in the big city, however, “I was ready to be gone,” she says. “I was ready to see the sky.” She got her wish after landing an OBT apprenticeship in 2003; when she arrived, she was wowed not only by Oregon's natural beauty (“Everything was so big and green”) but by OBT's company culture as well: “People work intelligently. There's a lot of thought and care put into the technique, and a strong work ethic.”

The admiration was mutual: OBT offered Bouchard a full-time corps member job in 2004 and promoted her to soloist in 2008. Her last 15 years as an OBT dancer have been fairly routine, her work hours meted out to technique class, rehearsal and performance, although to many non-dancers, her job seems anything but ordinary. “People would say to me, ‘I've never met a real ballerina before.’ Saying you're a ballerina is like saying you're a princess or a unicorn,” she says. “Many people [are] unfamiliar with the idea that this is a career path.”

It is, of course, and like many careers, it offers pet projects and professional disappointments. Bouchard has gotten to stretch her technical and artistic skills in a range of classical and contemporary ballets, including such personal favorites as William Forsythe's *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* and Helen Pickett's *Petal*, although she has also faced casting letdowns too, such as dancing the mother in *Romeo and Juliet* instead of Juliet herself. And her retirement means that now there are ballets she'll never perform, although she's made peace with that.





*Candace Bouchard and Artur Sultanov in Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2007 production of William Forsythe's *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude*/Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert*

"OBT is doing a Jiri Kylián piece in the spring, and I never had the chance to dance his work, but I'm excited to see my colleagues do that," she says. "I'm satisfied. I get to be featured all the time in great roles. It's been a great ride." And she's leaving on her own terms, which not all dancers get to do. "I'm getting out before things really fall apart," she says. "I don't have a ton of injuries; I've always been pretty sturdy. I feel lucky that I'm making that choice."

And even if maturity isn't the number-one quality the dance industry prizes, Bouchard believes she's had plenty to offer throughout her tenure. "When I started, I was fascinated; everything seemed exciting and fresh," she says. "My role in the studio is different now. It used to be all about me: 'What can I learn? How can I get roles?' Now, it's 'How can I help dancers find their own path?'"

The Next Stage

Bouchard's own path took an unexpected turn in 2009 when she launched Uprising, which paired OBT dancers with indie bands (such as Horse Feathers) live onstage at local clubs (such as Mississippi Studios and the Wonder Ballroom). She served as producer, choreographer and marketer for Uprising's three installments, designed to present ballet in a more intimate and casual atmosphere. "It came at a time when the company was struggling through the recession and everyone was wondering how we attract younger audiences," she says. "A lot of ballet companies seemed to be waving at new audiences from a distance, shouting, 'Hey! What we're doing over here is really cool!' But I think so much of the thrill of attending a performance is about the feeling of the event. Is it stuffy? Do you feel like you have to sit down, shut up and not ask questions for fear of judgment from those around you?"

In 2013, OBT's board of trustees asked Bouchard to help on its marketing committee; eventually, she was named marketing coordinator, which meant writing copy for OBT's ads, working with the box office on special offers and dealing with media—all while she was still dancing. Eventually she decided to step down from the position so that she could focus more fully on dance.



*Candace Bouchard in Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2013 production of George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*/Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert.*

But Bouchard found she liked marketing, especially the communications part, which is why she's now thinking beyond such traditional post-dance gigs as instructor or choreographer. "I'm not planning to teach," she says firmly. "There are already people who are really good at that. I've done some soul searching on that topic and I'm probably headed toward marketing. I think I might want to work for a much larger company. I'm coming off this very narrow path that I've been following since I was 5, and the world seems so much larger now."

What She Won't Miss

Bouchard says burnout also played a role in her decision to retire. As much as she loves ballet and believes she'll be involved with it in some capacity later, there are facets of the profession that frustrate her. "I think there's room for more diversity," she says. "I am not considered a slim dancer: I have had moments where I have missed or nearly missed opportunities because I wasn't skinny enough. With me it's size, but there are other diversity issues in ballet."

She has been encouraged by OBT's Learn About Ballet program, which does outreach in schools and arranges scholarships for ballet-loving kids from various socioeconomic backgrounds to study at the OBT school. But while companies have made progress, there is still a dearth of female artistic directors in an industry dominated by women, and because the competition among women is formidable, female dancers can feel replaceable: "You screw up and there are people ready to take your place," she says.



*Candace Bouchard dances in *The Nutcracker* one last time before her retirement from Oregon Ballet Theatre/Photo by Blaine Truitt Covert*

Now that she doesn't have to worry about being replaced, she's free to pursue new—and potentially risky—hobbies. "I've never been skiing," she says. "I went snowboarding once and it went badly. Now I can try it again without fear of being injured and sidelined."

And not dancing evenings, weekends and matinees during *Nutcracker* season means she'll have more holiday time to spend with family (she got married this summer) and friends: "I just had to RSVP for another holiday brunch. I said, 'Not now, but definitely next year!'"

And What She Will

Although she's looking forward to new opportunities, Bouchard says she'll miss her current co-workers: "I'm so in awe of my fellow dancers. I'll miss the camaraderie. I don't know another job where you end your day in a dressing room decompressing with your girlfriends about what just happened." OBT is special, she says, because "everyone seems to want to see each other succeed. I love that team mentality; I think that's specific to OBT."

And she'll miss performing and the sense of connection ballet has given her to something bigger than herself. "I feel an incredible bond with the audience," she says of dancing. "There's so much effort to be good enough and a desire to make people happy. What I love about ballet in particular is that everyone is striving to be the most beautiful, coordinated, in-tune instrument and show people what the body can do—I hope that makes them feel like anything is possible."

NOTE

You can see Candace Bouchard in the *The Nutcracker*, which runs December 9-24 in Keller Auditorium.



Recommend 207 people recommend this. Sign Up to see what your friends recommend.

Related

[Nutcracking the code, with feeling](#)
December 16, 2013
In "DANCE"

[No fooling: This time, 'The Nutcracker' is magical](#)
December 11, 2012
In "DANCE"

[Review: OBT's farewell to Alison](#)
April 19, 2014
In "DANCE"

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)

Comments are closed.

Search

Archives

[Arts Resources](#)

[Oregon ComposersWatch](#)

Archives

[October 2018](#)
[September 2018](#)
[August 2018](#)
[July 2018](#)
[June 2018](#)

Follow ArtsWatch

[ArtsWatch](#)

[OrArtsWatch](#)

[RSS Feed](#)