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## New York

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## - Cory Stearns 5th Seiskaya trained dancer @ ABT

### The new kid on the block

ABT's Cory Stearns makes a huge leap this season—for starters: Conrad.

By **Gia Kourlas**

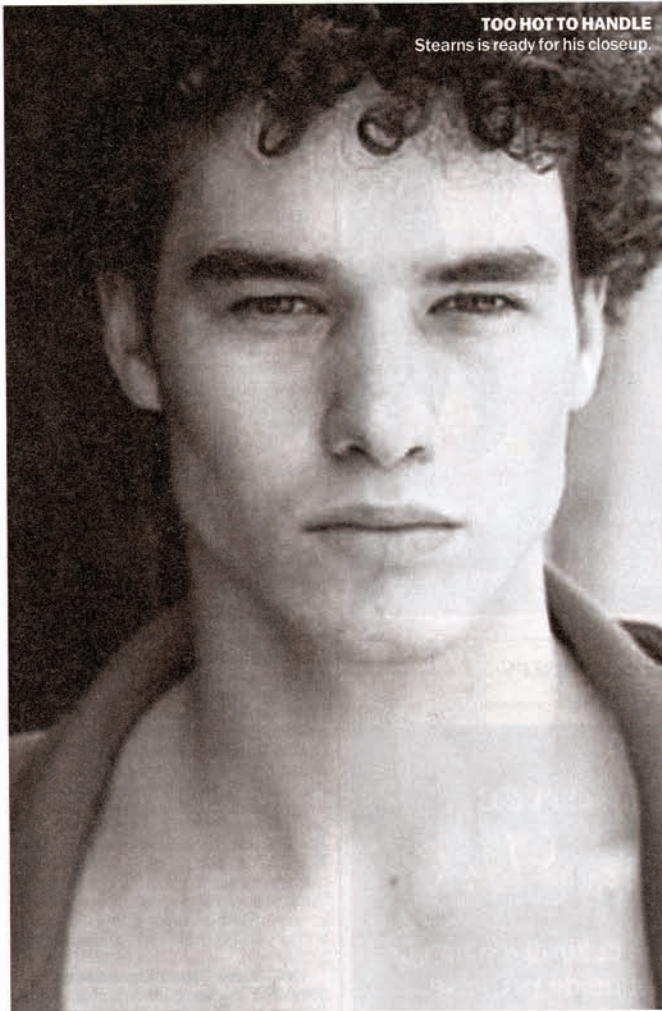
Ballet can be like baseball: As any dancer in the corps de ballet knows, you have to be ready to jump off the bench. At American Ballet Theatre, Cory Stearns, 22, is the latest to find himself in that situation. The Long Island native, gorgeous in a storybook-hero kind of way, makes his debut as the dashing Conrad in *Le Corsaire* on the afternoon of Saturday 24. "Cory has a lot on his plate," says Susan Jones, a ballet master with the company. "He has a lot of strength, but he's still finding out about where it is and when he can call on it. He's going to be fine with it—more than fine—but I hope that he can just make that steady progression, which he seems to be doing. It's quite exciting." Stearns, who trained with Valia Seiskaya before relocating to London's Royal Ballet School—where he not only perfected his technique but also appeared in a Kylie Minogue video—spoke about his highly anticipated ABT season.

#### Who decided you would be a dancer?

Originally, it was my mother. My family was very athletic, and I think she wanted the kids to be balanced; she didn't want us to be jocks. She wanted us to have musicality and grace, so she put us into dance when we were very young. She was very strategic in her offers to allow me to quit. She'd say, "Just wait, just wait." Then, after a performance, she'd say, "Do you want to quit now?" [Laughs] I had a hard time in school with friends. Big time.

#### People made fun of you because of ballet?

Yes. Seventh through ninth grades were rough. And in tenth grade, there was a huge switch. Out of nowhere, everybody started respecting what I did. My school principal called me in and said, "We're having this program where some kids in school that do extracurricular things are going to speak in the gymnasium." Whether or not to do it was a *big* decision for me. I had received a lot of criticism for dancing. I said, "I can't be embarrassed for what I do if I'm



**TOO HOT TO HANDLE**  
Stearns is ready for his closeup.

going to do it for the rest of my life, and there's nothing embarrassing about it." After I did it, people who had really given me the hardest time were obviously kind of abashed. They were embarrassed, and they apologized.

#### Shortly after, you moved to London to study at the Royal Ballet School. How old were you and how long did you stay?

I was 15. I stayed for three years. I remember the first day: I was doing a combination and I messed up and I cursed out loud, and that is unheard of. My teacher stopped class and said, "Mr. Stearns, we do not use that language in Royal Ballet School. Next time you do that, I'll send you to the director's office." That was pretty much the introduction I had to

Royal. It was all about port de bras and your extremities, how you work your feet and cleanliness. That gave me a new perspective on dance and on how much work I had to do. I lost a lot of confidence when I went there, but I think it was good for me.

#### How long have you been working on Conrad in *Le Corsaire*?

Not very long. I'm working with Kevin McKenzie, which is amazing. He's been working with me on how to hold myself. The way I have dealt with my nerves is to pull back. So when I'm onstage, I'd be in myself, thinking of what I had to do—which, surprisingly, everybody notices. [Laughs] So you can't do that. Transitions are the hardest part of maintaining that energy when I'm dead tired. Instead of just doing

the jump, the mind, the walk has to be *out*, no matter how tired I am. So that's going to be my goal—to maintain that energy.

#### What do you want out of your dancing career?

[Laughs] Satisfaction. I guess what I get out of it right now... [Pauses] Art has so much depth. I guess I'm trying to find that in myself. I'm 22, and I'm in ABT, but I'm not even close to finding it. I want to get to a point where I feel like an artist, not just a dancer who can do steps correctly. I feel when Julie Kent dances, she finds something so deep inside of herself and brings it out. Everything is so coordinated and harmonious, and it's not just evident in the way she works, it's also what she gives to her partner. That's what I want. I guess I don't really think about what I'm getting out of it; I'm learning about the art itself, and that's enough.

**"I want to feel like an artist, not just a dancer who can do steps correctly."**

#### Do you think you're in the right company?

I do *now*. I almost left last year. I almost went to Spain with Angel Corella's company. I wasn't upset that I wasn't being given attention. I was upset because at 21 or 22, I don't really have that long left as a ballet dancer, and I wondered if I was wasting time. I asked Kevin, "Do you think I should stay, or would I improve more if I left and started working on roles right now?" He said, "I know it's slow—but all this time off you have right now is time you might be wishing you had more of when you're onstage and you have to do a huge role in front of 3,000 people." He's right. I felt like I had a lot of journey to go and that becomes tedious of course, but now I'm at that point where I'm learning these roles—and it's already almost the Met season. I might have been in Spain. I'm so glad I stayed.

*American Ballet Theatre performs at the Metropolitan Opera House through Jul 12. For the complete interview, visit [timeoutnewyork.com](http://timeoutnewyork.com).*