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Nayon Iovino of Ballet Arizona on the Freedom of Dancing Lead Roles



Meet Nayon Iovino, pictured performing in *Napoli*.

*Every other year, New Times puts the spotlight on Phoenix's creative forces — painters, dancers, designers, and actors. Leading up to the release of Best of Phoenix, we're taking a closer look at 100 more. Welcome to the 2016 edition of 100 Creatives. Up today is 42. **Nayon Iovino**.*

Nayon Iovino didn't choose dance. "Dance was the one who chose me," the 26-year-old says. "It was completely out of my control."

Growing up in Goiania, Goias, Brazil, the young dancer gained a national audience at 17 when he competed in the Youth American Grand Prix, the intensive international ballet competition held in New York. He won a scholarship to study at the Washington School of Ballet and came to the States

in 2007. He went on to dance in the Houston Ballet's second company, rejoin the Washington Ballet as a professional dancer, and then moved to Phoenix to join Ballet Arizona in 2012.

Dance is part of his daily life, inextricably so. Lovino spends eight hours a day dancing, whether full-length classical ballets or contemporary works.

"Performing leading roles has been very fulfilling," Lovino says of his center-stage work in productions including Napoli. "I really enjoy experiencing that freedom on stage."

He also choreographs for Ballet Arizona. His piece 9 O'Clock, inspired by Latin American telenovelas, was performed to acclaim during Innovations, a program that showcased Ballet Arizona's burgeoning choreography talent.

"Choreographing for Ballet Arizona's Masters of Movement program was also an accomplishment of which I'm very proud," he says, citing his most predominant influences as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Rudolf Nureyev, Ohad Naharin, and Crystal Pite. "Ib Andersen, the artistic director of Ballet Arizona, has been a big influence in my career, too."

The key to Lovino's expanding choreography repertoire and improvement as a dancer, he says, is constantly learning. "It frees my mind for new ideas and concepts for new choreography," Lovino says. "As a dancer, I strive to improve and perform better with every new role. When I see visible results, it inspires me to keep pushing myself."

Teaching helps, too. Lovino leads classes at the School of Ballet Arizona several days a week, but he makes sure to carve out time for non-dance activities as well.

"Most evenings I cook dinner, play guitar, and relax," he says, adding that some nights are devoted to practice with his band, the Wild Swings. "If I am choreographing, I spend time preparing and thinking about what I will do the next day. Occasionally, I paint with acrylics."

I came to Phoenix with a lot of enthusiasm to dance with Ballet Arizona.

I make art because it's fulfilling to see something from my imagination come to life.

I'm most productive when I'm being challenged in rehearsals. As a choreographer, creativity comes to me randomly.

My inspiration wall is full of people who don't believe in their limitations.

I've learned most from my family, my teachers, and my mistakes.

Good work should always be full of the artist's soul.

The Phoenix creative scene could use more collaboration and more exposure.