

Michaela DePrince

The ballet powerhouse moves up the ranks at Dutch National Ballet.

BY LAUREN WINGENROTH

*Michaela DePrince has defied the odds again and again. She overcame incredible circumstances, rising from an orphanage in war-torn Sierra Leone to join Dutch National Ballet, where she was recently promoted to grand sujet (demi-soloist). With principal roles and book deals under her belt, DePrince is still doing the impossible—managing her schedule as a college student, an international guest artist, an ambassador for War Child Holland (an organization for children living in war zones) and, most recently, a featured dancer in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*.*

You're in Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade*. How did that happen?

Her publicist emailed my mom. At first, I was like, "It's totally fake, it's totally fake." I sent it to my agent and she contacted Beyoncé's publicist. They emailed us on a Monday, and I was in New Orleans filming on Friday. I was there for four days. And I got to meet her! One of my best friends absolutely adores her, so I was trying to see if she could sign something for him. I didn't have anything for her to sign, so she said, "Oh, I'll just call him."

You were just promoted. Where do you see your new position taking you?

Every little girl dreams of being a principal one day. But for me, the older I get, the more I just want to grow as an artist. So if I don't get to become a principal, it's okay. I really want to move people when I dance.

You've been at Dutch National Ballet for a while now. Does it feel like home?

It's my third season. I should know Dutch by now, but I still don't speak any! But even when I was 15 and had the opportunity to perform in The Hague, I felt at home right away—that's the reason why I wanted to go there. It's a very international company, so it's nice that we're all from

different places and have a little family there. Because we all miss our families.

What roles are you looking forward to performing?

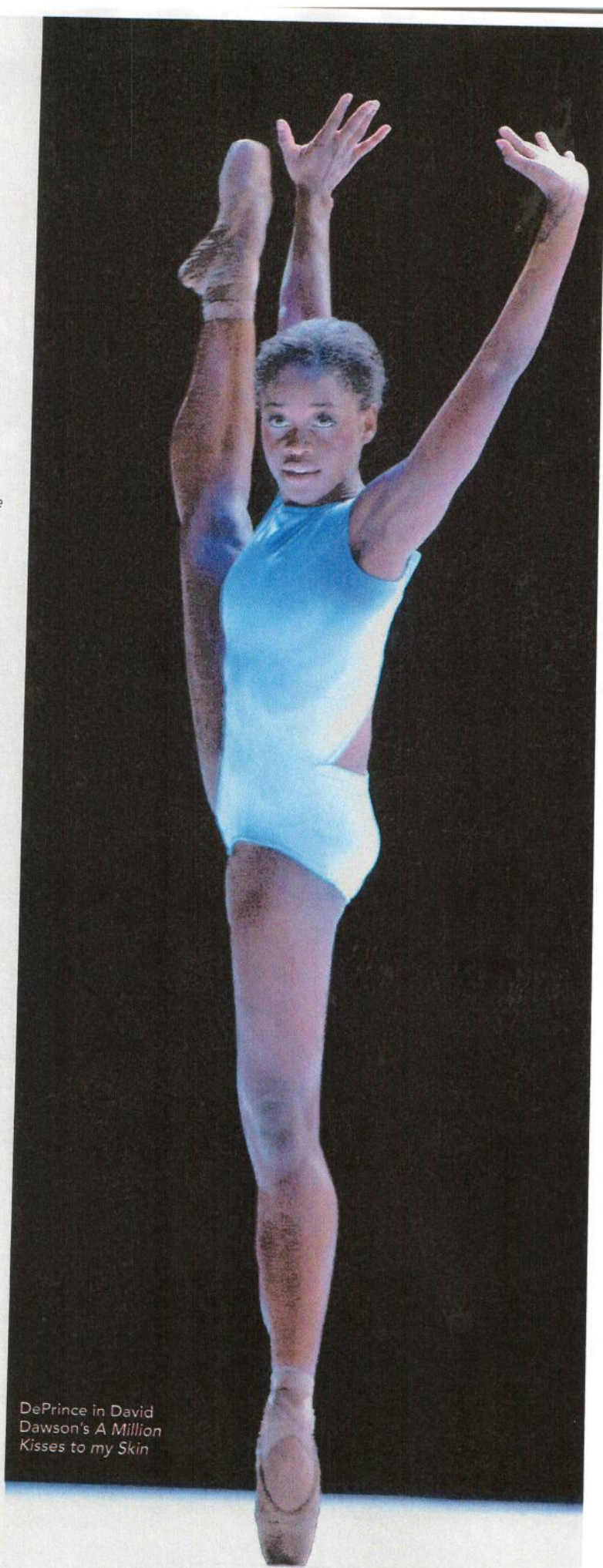
I'm hoping I'll do something really nice in *La Bayadère*, but I'm not quite sure. I don't want to put pressure on my director just because I got promoted.

Do you have any other projects in the works?

This month I'm going to Guadalajara to perform in Isaac Hernández's gala to raise money for his school in Mexico. I've known him since I was 8 years old. This is an amazing project for me because I've wanted to open up a school in Sierra Leone so kids can dance there for free. But right now I'm focusing on Dutch National. We have an amazing program coming up, and we're working with Justin Peck on *Year of the Rabbit*. I'm also studying for college right now. I'm going to be studying human rights, but right now I'm just working on English courses.

Do you ever picture yourself dancing for an American company?

I would love to dance for San Francisco Ballet. But right now I really love Dutch National. If it works out that I'm invited to a different company, then great. But I'll probably stay here for quite a while. ■



DePrince in David Dawson's *A Million Kisses to my Skin*