

dance

Born to Dance

Rising ballet star shows wisdom beyond his 15 years

by Rebecca Ragain

Moses Kaplan doesn't get much sleep. The 15-year-old Lincoln High School student heads to the gym at 5 a.m. He dances a minimum of three hours a day, six days a week, on top of a heavy load of homework.

The long days don't faze Kaplan, who has been juggling his academic and dance studies for nearly eight years. "I've been doing it forever," he says.

"Moses always responded really well to music and he always danced," recalls his mother, Marianne Koch. His father, Dan, adds: "Right from when he could walk. Maybe before."

By the time Kaplan was 8, the redheaded boy was participating in Oregon Ballet Theatre's annual production of *The Nutcracker*. In 2001, he transferred to a new school, Pacific Artists Dance Center, to continue his ballet instruction.

Nancy Davis, artistic director of the center's performance company, Pacific Artists Ballet Theatre, has watched Kaplan grow up through the years. She praises his attitude and intelligence, as well as his

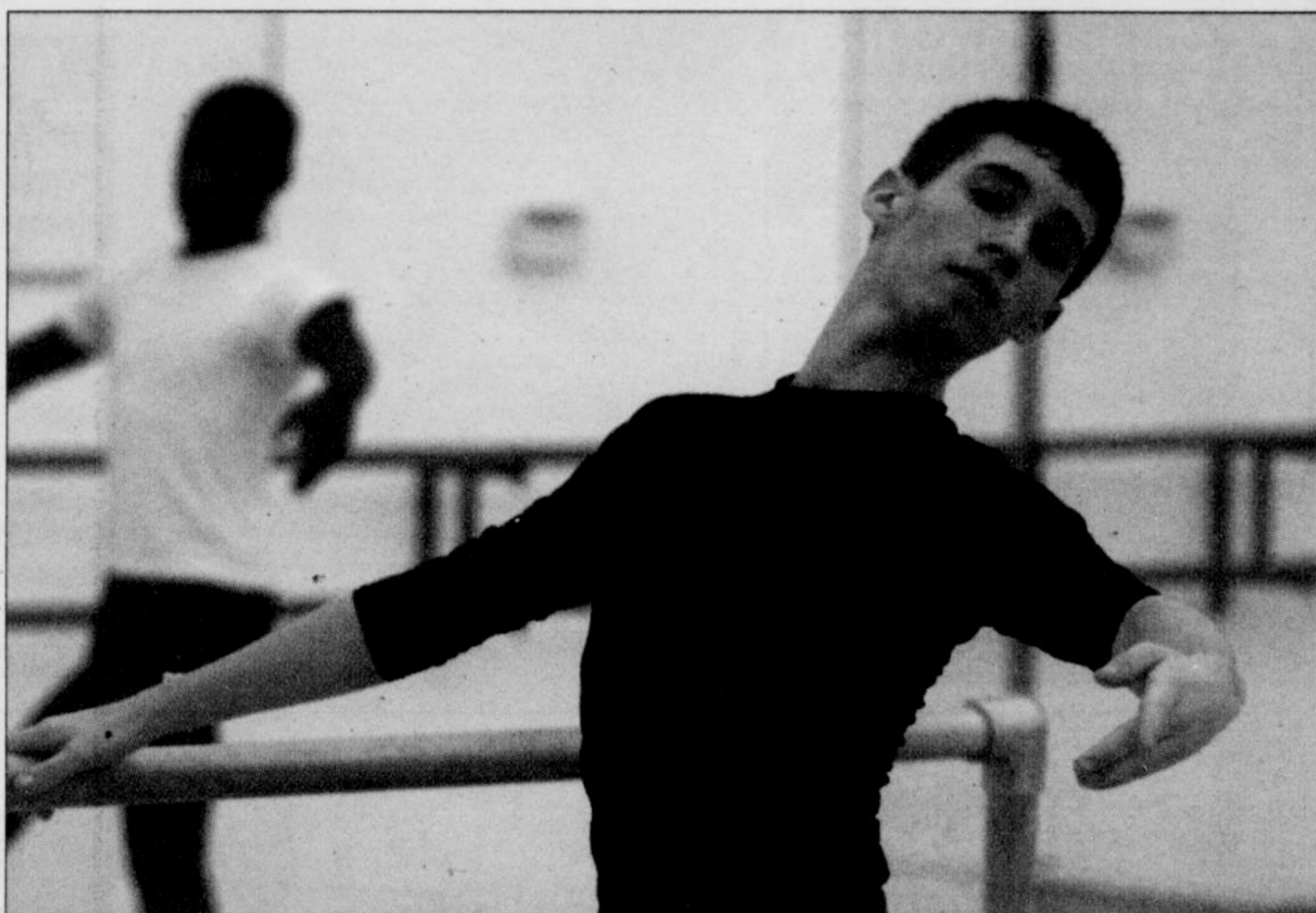
technical skill.

"He's very bright. I will often call on him to demonstrate more intricate combinations," says Davis. "He's a great help to me."

This year, Davis has assigned Kaplan three roles in the company's annual holiday production, *La Boutique Fantasque (The Enchanted Toyshop)*. Out of more than 50 cast members, only five are performing three separate roles.

In addition to playing the Can-can Master for the third consecutive year, Kaplan takes on the parts of the shopkeeper and the lead male tarantella dancer. Davis says the latter is the show's most technically challenging male role, adding, "Moses has definitely earned it."

Kaplan has formed tight bonds with both Davis and men's teacher Alex Ballard. He describes the instructors as "phenomenal" and says he can't



Moses Kaplan hopes to start studying at Juilliard next fall.

imagine finding more personalized training anywhere else. He is particularly appreciative of Davis' support of his choreographic endeavors.

"Choreography is an ability for me to flex my creative muscle," says the self-possessed young man. "It is an extension of my love for dance. I love to move and I love to watch movement, so I love to piece together movements that are aesthetic in my own mind."

Kaplan's works have been performed by Pacific Artists Ballet Theatre and by Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy. Last year, he was awarded second prize in the Weiler Choreography Competition.

In February, Kaplan will fly to San Francisco to audition for early admission to The Juilliard School. He has been accelerating his high school studies so that, if accepted, he can begin at Juilliard next fall. To prepare for the audition, he is working on two solos. One is a ballet variation, and the other is a modern dance work he is choreographing himself.

"I feel like my strength is modern dance. Eight years of ballet has been really good for me, and I know that I need that training to succeed...but I just think that as a dancer I am more attuned to do modern," says Kaplan, who is gay.

No matter where his studies take him, he ultimately wants to become a choreographer and to direct his own dance company.

To that, Davis responds, "I can't see why he can't do it," citing both his passion and maturity as a dancer as promising characteristics.

Even off the stage, Kaplan shows wisdom beyond his years. In his pursuit of dance he has discovered life lessons that many adults never uncover. Training of any sort can be discouraging, says Kaplan, because you are always being compared to someone who is better than you are. But he has learned how to stay true to himself during the process.

"Look for what you can do in your own performance to make it individual and specific to yourself...find how you are different and how you are special," he says. "So much of the time we strive to be like those who we see as perfect in our eyes, and we allow what is the most amazing part of us, which is our own individuality, to just get washed away." 

LA BOUTIQUE FANTASQUE runs 7:30 p.m. Dec. 16; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Dec. 17; and 1 and 4 p.m. Dec. 18 at the Performing Arts Center on Portland Community College's Sylvania Campus, 12000 S.W. 49th Ave. Tickets are \$10-\$18 from 503-452-8448.

MARTY DAVIS



Kaplan with his supportive family: from left, sister Mimi, mother Marianne Koch and father Dan.

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