

Inspiring moves

Famed ballerina Paige Fraser never let a chronic spinal condition stand in the way of her dream

BY ALEXANDRIA SPILLMAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

You may recognize her from her silhouette that danced across a dim stage in the Intel Superbowl commercial “Experience Amazing” that aired in February, but Paige Fraser’s appearance on nationwide television is only proof of her claim to fame, not the root of the fame itself.

Fraser, a dancer of more than two decades, was diagnosed with scoliosis during her freshman year of high school – a pivotal time period she described as “right when you’re growing into your body.” Doctors told her the curvature in her spine mandated surgery and more than likely marked the end of her dancing career. That was 13 years ago and also when her first steps to fame were planted.

Fraser and her family made the unpopular choice not to follow doctors’ orders – a choice she admitted is not right for everyone, especially those with severe spinal curvatures that create other serious health problems. After researching on their own, she and her family found a chiropractor who performed adjustments and spine manipulations. Fraser also wore a back brace for years, and she learned to work with and appreciate the body she was growing into.

“There are limitations I had and still have today,” Fraser explained. “My center of gravity may be off, I may not feel as strong, or my back may be a little sore, but these are all things that every dancer experiences. That’s why I’m grateful that I didn’t get the surgery. It would have ended my career before it started.”

Fraser persevered through pain and missteps, but she was not alone. Fraser gained strength and confidence in her body with the help of mentors and loved ones.

“I was lucky because one of my teachers in high school had the same condition,” Fraser said. “She was able to give me a lot of one-on-one coaching and help me find

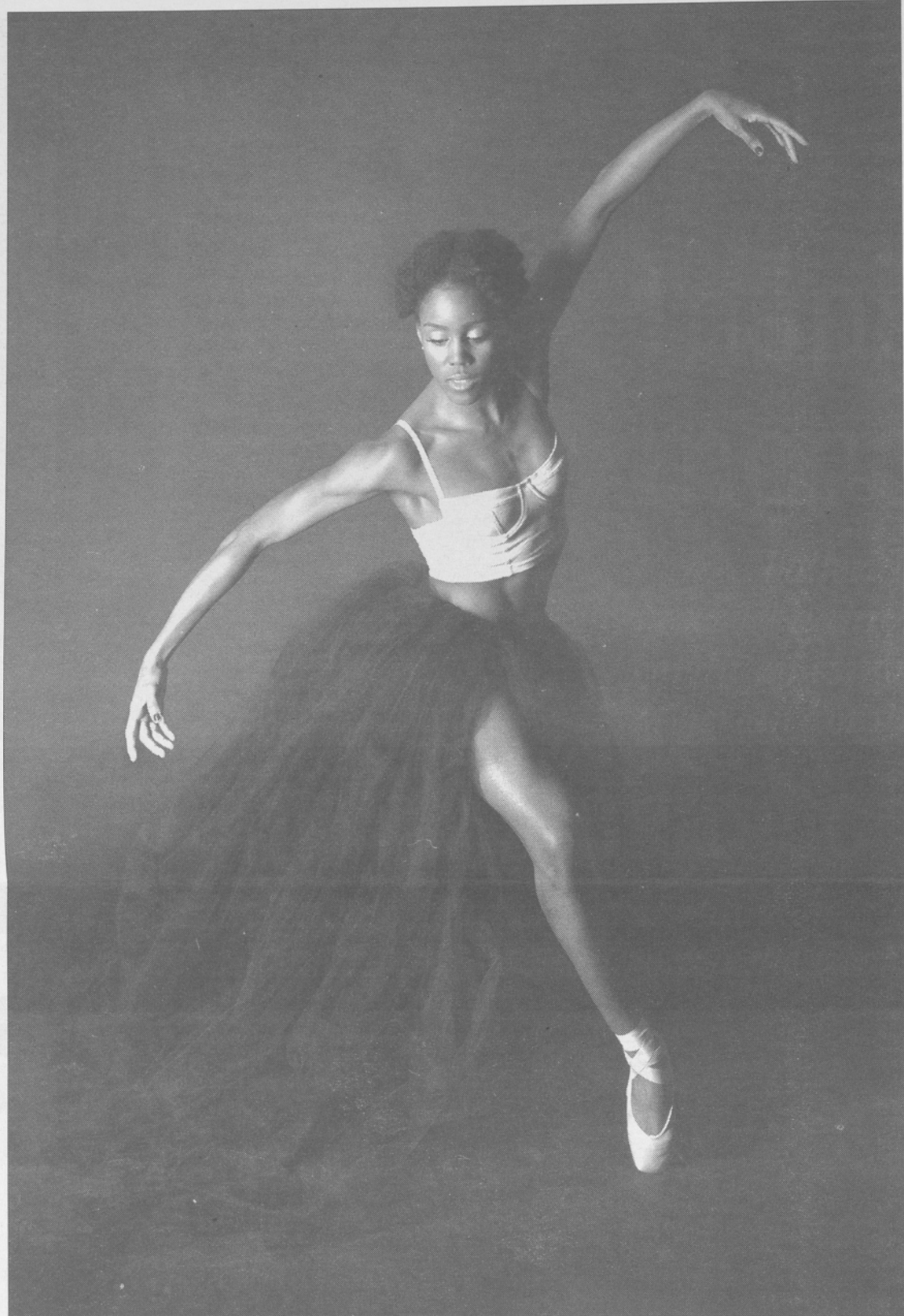
different ways to understand my body.”

After high school in New York City, Fraser went on to dance in college, first at Dominican University of California in Alonzo King’s Lines Ballet BFA program. The Lines Ballet was not her first choice, however; she had prepared for Ailey and Juilliard in NYC, but Fraser’s standardized test scores proved to be another barrier in her mission to establish a career in dance. She felt like she was supposed to be in California at Lines Ballet when she arrived, but she knew this would only be temporary.

Fraser put in the extra hours at practices and studying in hopes of proving her test scores wrong, and it paid off. With straight A’s, supportive advisors, and an urge to return to NYC, Fraser transferred to Fordham University and soon entered the Ailey II School. As a student and young

performer in the Ailey II company – already a huge feat in the dancing community – she traveled the world as a cultural ambassador.

Performing in the Ailey II Company is, by design, a two-year commitment. Once Fraser’s two years were completed in 2013, she began her search for a more permanent job. She knew that auditions in NYC would be incredibly competitive with every New York dancer aiming for the same Broadway shows. Fraser opened up her options and found Visceral Dance in Chicago. Even though auditions were already underway when she stumbled across the company, she sent in her resume, cover letter and dance portfolio to the artistic director anyway. A Skype interview and three weeks later, Fraser had landed a job and was packing for



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NOHEMI MORAN FOR NOMEET