

Onstage, Andrea Parson appears trapped in lamplight, like a moth. Rapid-fire spoken words set her pace and for the next 15 minutes, she seems to teeter on the edge of sanity. At one moment, her foot spirals upward, searches above her head, past her ear—then whacks the floor. At another, her arm cuts like a sword into the surrounding darkness.

This on-the-edge-of-your-seat solo *Not I* was choreographed for 23-year-old Andrea by Sarah Slipper, artistic director of the Northwest Dance Project (NWD), a company Andrea has been a part of since 2007. *Not I* showcases Andrea's technique and her unbelievable artistry. Fittingly, in November, she was honored with the prestigious Princess Grace Award in Dance.

But this budding superstar hasn't been handed everything on a silver platter. Instead, Andrea has built her career with the qualities she'll need to become a long-lasting artist in the dance world—strong technique, tenacity and determination—because what matters to her most is not the accolades or the attention, but the work. In fact, because of her stamina and laser-like focus, Slipper nicknamed Andrea, "Terminator."

Andrea began dancing at age 3 at a competition studio called Oregon Dance Academy (which no longer exists). She took a break at age 9 for a few years, then from ages 12 to 18 did her pre-professional training at the Northwest Conservatory of Dance in Hillsboro, OR. She took classes in classical ballet and jazz, adding modern to her rep in high school. By 18, Andrea had also attended two different Joffrey Ballet programs.

Andrea says her parents were supportive, but it wasn't easy to get them to pay for as many classes as she wanted. "It got to be expensive," Andrea says. So she and her mother held fundraisers with family and friends. "I was very strong-willed, but my real challenge was convincing myself that I could become a professional dancer and then showing that to them."

A turning point for Andrea happened just before she started college, in August 2005, when she saw the Northwest Dance Project (known then as the Northwest Professional Dance Project) perform. At the time, the NWDPP was one of the only groups in the US dancing almost all newly commissioned works from an international roster of choreographers. Andrea was "blown away" by the dancers, who were young, hip and gifted, and the contemporary ballet style she saw on stage.



LUCA VEGGETTI, NEWLY APPOINTED RESIDENT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF MORPHOSES FOR THE 2011-2012 SEASON, ON ANDREA: "She has a beautiful quality and is extremely focused. The way she approaches work is really an example of how a dancer should behave."



ANDREA PARSON ON PRAISE: "No, it's not about recognition or praise. I need to dance. No amount of affirmation will satisfy me because it's not what I need."

ANDREA PARSON DESCRIBES HER OWN DANCING AS "EXPLORATORY, ANIMALISTIC AND LIKE A CHILD AT PLAY." HERE WE GET TO THE BOTTOM OF HER AWESOMENESS.

By Austin Buchholtz

Putting the "Grrr..."

in Grace

Photography by Nathan Sayers



(Right) 2010 Princess Grace awardees with HRH the Princess of Hanover (center)

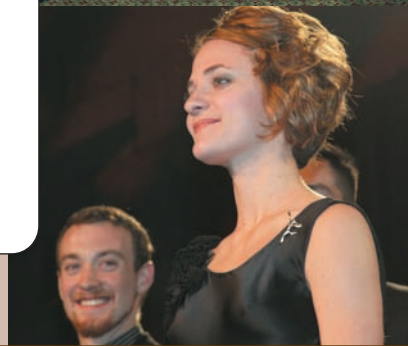


ANDREA PARSON ON HER 2010 PRINCESS GRACE AWARD NIGHT:

"The gala was incredible—one of the best nights of my life!" Actor Denzel Washington said something that Andrea says will stick with her:

"It's not how much you have, but what you do with what you have."

"One of my favorite parts of the evening was walking the red carpet outside of the event. For a moment, I felt like I was at the Oscars or the Grammys."



FAST FACTS

- BIRTHDAY:** March 11, 1987
- FAVORITE FOOD:** Almond butter
- DREAM VACATION SPOT:** Islands of the South Pacific
- FAVORITE PLACE TO TOUR TO:** Germany
- IF I WERE NOT A DANCER...** "I'd do post-graduate service, travel, live in a different part of the world, teach, work with kids."
- MOST-PLAYED SONG ON HER IPOD:** "Silent Shout" by The Knife
- FAVORITE DESSERT:** Cheesecake
- GUILTY PLEASURE:** "Spending extra time preparing home-cooked meals like sourdough sweet potato pancakes."
- FAVORITE MOVIE:** *Sixteen Candles*
- FAVORITE CHOREOGRAPHER:** Andrea Miller, artistic director of Gallim Dance
- ADVICE FOR DANCE SPIRIT READERS:** "Don't set limits for yourself. Just go for it. Stand in front in class—get up there even if you're scared. It's OK to feel uncomfortable."



NWDP DANCER SAMANTHA CAMPBELL ON ANDREA'S COMMITMENT:
 "You know she's in it from beginning to end."

At Loyola Marymount University in L.A., Andrea continued with her ballet training, but the program emphasized modern dance. Then, in the spring of 2006 (her freshman year), she got the opportunity to audition for NWDP's affiliated summer training-and-audition project, now called LAUNCH. She didn't get in. She says she wasn't familiar enough with contemporary ballet yet and she didn't perform her best because she felt intimidated. However, she became determined to eventually make it.

In the summer of 2007, Andrea enrolled in San Francisco Conservatory of Dance to learn more about contemporary ballet. For the next year, she also attended extra ballet classes and met often with her professors to discuss how she could improve. Later that year, her audition was successful.

During her first summer at NWDP, Andrea danced a solo in *Not Yet* by Cayetano Soto and in *Inner Shore* by Luca Veggetti—the newly appointed resident artistic director of Morphoses for the 2011–12 season.

From them she learned you must set aside your own ideas of a choreographer's work, to be open and "to be fearless."

These days, NWDP is Andrea's second home. "It's another family," she says. "I feel like a worker. I love it." As part of NWDP, Andrea rehearses six days a week and teaches. Through NWDP and LAUNCH she has worked with renowned choreographers and directors including Andrea Miller, Aszure Barton, James Canfield, Benoit-Swan Pouffer and many more.

Company dancer Patrick Kilbane says Andrea leads by example. "She challenges all of us," he says. "There's an innate focus to her work which forces us to rise to that level of commitment."

Andrea has the same praise for her colleagues. "Everyone at NWDP is young, vibrant and emerging," Andrea says. "Sarah Slipper often brings in choreographers who don't usually work on the West Coast or even in the US. I'm so thankful for that. It's an education as much as it is a job."

Now, Andrea's even getting her own opportunities to choreograph, under the guidance of Slipper and others. As a fledgling dance creator, she already has mantras: "First research and improv. Be patient and let things unfold naturally," she says. "Andrea Miller told me: 'Just try anything, even if you have doubts.'"

On top of making her own dances, Andrea would also eventually like to work in Europe, with Rachel Tess of Rumpus Room Dance and again with Andrea Miller of Gallim Dance. But for now, she's happy to take on all she can from the studios of NWDP's home in Portland, OR.

After the 2010 Princess Grace Award ceremony, Andrea reflected: "The entire night and celebration have been so inspiring to me," she says. "I feel I'm at the beginning of a journey in which there are no limits." **DS**

Austin Buchholtz teaches American style ballroom and Latin dance, and enjoys watching all forms. He covers dance from Portland, OR.

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(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) MATT PEYTON, (2) JERRY LACAY