



# Ballerina in the Burbs

Houston Ballet Principal Sara Webb Calls Cypress Home

Photo by Amitave Sarkar

*Written by  
Nancy Wozny*

When Houston Ballet principal ballerina Sara Webb finishes rehearsing those spot-on 32 pirouettes in the role of the Black Swan, she heads home to Cypress, where she lives with her husband Ryan Bardo and their 17-month-old son Joshua. Webb is excited to get a second go at the role of Odette/Odile, also known as the white and black swans in Stanton Welch's re-vamped and extravagant

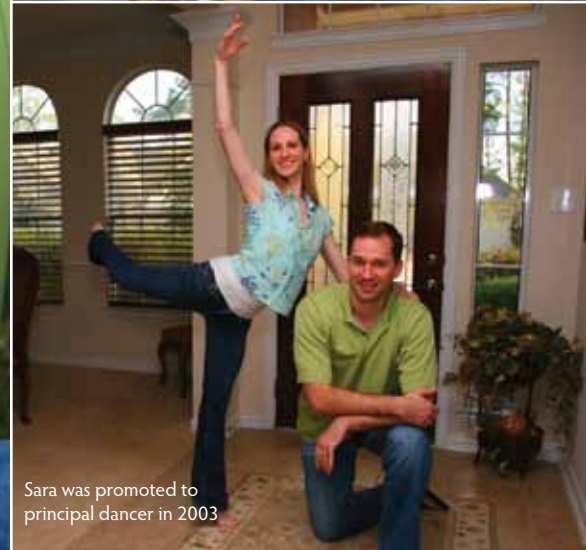
production of "Swan Lake", which premiered in 2006 and concludes this season. "It's a great role for any ballerina," says Webb. "But it's also incredibly demanding to dance both roles." Famous for her gorgeous lines, technical precision, and charismatic stage charm, Webb commands the audience's attention in both classical story ballets and more contemporary work.



Sara and her husband Ryan moved to Cypress five years ago



Sara and Ryan's son Joshua is 17 months old



Sara was promoted to principal dancer in 2003



Ryan and Joshua surprised Sarah on stage for her first Mother's Day

Photos above by Jan Saenz

### A Swan Swims in Cypress

Born in Dallas, Webb spent her early years in Las Vegas. "I was raised outside of Las Vegas," says Webb. "I'm just a suburban girl." She and her husband selected the Highland Timbers subdivision just off Highway 249 because it's small, nicely wooded, and off the beaten track. "I just love how safe it feels and there's no traffic,"

admits Webb. "We have our favorite Mexican restaurants, and I like that I don't have to go downtown to find something to do." Webb and her husband moved here five years ago. At the time, her husband was serving in Iraq as a Captain in the Army's Signal Corps. Since returning in 2003, he has finished law school and works at Boyar & Miller in the Galleria area.

### A Ballerina Makes her Pointe

Webb hardly remembers a time when she wasn't dancing. She received her early training at the Academy of Nevada Dance Theater. "I always danced, but around my teenage years I got very serious," says the petite dancer. Webb left her family at 14 to study at the Harid Conservatory. "It was hard to be away from my family, but

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we talked all the time," she says. "My mother became my best friend at a time when most teens are fighting with their moms." At 17, she headed to Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, where she spent one year in level 8 and another as an apprentice. She joined the corps de ballet in 1997, and was promoted to soloist after just three years. In 2003, she was promoted to principal during a dramatic on-stage announcement by Welch after her stellar performance in Ben Stevenson's "The Nutcracker."

Welch was well acquainted with Webb's talents before he took over the company in 2003. "She was in "Bruiser," my very first piece for the Houston Ballet," says Welch. "I noticed her talents immediately. She's extraordinarily athletic and versatile; she will try anything. And, of course, she has lovely lines and technical facility." Webb has since appeared in several of Welch's super technical ballets and will be dancing in his romantic ballet, "Nosotros," set to Rachmaninoff's lush score.

## A Season to Remember

Webb has had a banner year, which includes an outstanding performance in New York City and guesting with Ballet West. Last September, she traveled to New York with fellow principal Connor Walsh to perform George Balanchine's Tchaikovsky pas de deux in Fall For Dance, an international dance festival. "It was a bit nerve-racking to have all those eyes on us," remembers Webb. "It's natural to get nervous, but it's still such an honor to be sharing the bill with so many famous dancers."

Last March, Webb donned a tall gray wig and an elaborate multi-layered wedding dress for the role of Marie Antoinette in Welch's world premiere ballet, "Marie." "It was such a challenge to transform into a real historical person; most of the time we are playing fictional characters," says Webb. "I love the Shostakovich music for Marie, it's so inspiring." With a flair for virtuosity, the ballerina also thrives in more contemporary work. Later in the spring, she got to flash her technical pyrotechnics in William Forsythe's "The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude."

"I know it has a crazy name, and I didn't like it at first because it was so hard. But it grew on me, and eventually I loved the challenge of the piece," she says. "It's technically exact, very fast, and the steps are difficult. It feels like 30 minutes condensed into 10."

## Balancing Dance and Motherhood

Life as a principal goes from 10 a.m. to 6:45 p.m., beginning with the morning ballet class and six-hour-long rehearsal sessions with only an hour for lunch. When Houston Ballet is in performance, the schedule is even more rigorous. She plans to make her July summer vacation all about her family. "We have swimming lessons planned, and lots of relaxed summer fun," says Webb. After summer break, Webb will head back to the ballet barre to begin work on Sir Kenneth MacMillan's masterpiece, "Manon," and other works. At 30, Webb is still in the peak of her career, yet she also has an eye on plan B. "I would like to have more children, and I haven't ruled out teaching," Webb says. "I may also return to college." While Webb was pregnant she took education classes at Lone Star College. "I've always been interested in special education, and I may pursue that more after I retire."

Right now the daily commute for the couple is worth it. "My hours are a bit off peak, and Ryan goes to the Galleria area so it's not too bad," says Webb. "We made a choice to live far away from the hubbub of the city." For now, Webb combines a successful career as a ballerina in the nation's fourth largest ballet company with being a mother and wife. She spends most of her down time at home with her family and enjoys her Sundays and Mondays at her cozy Cypress home. "I try to keep Mondays completely clear so I can spend time with Joshua," she says. Her son is still too young to understand the magnitude of his mother's many accomplishments, but he has attended some of her shows. After a performance of "Madame Butterfly" at Miller Outdoor Theatre, her husband and son brought her flowers on stage for her first mother's day. "Joshua probably won't remember it, but I will," says Webb tenderly. "When I am on stage I give my all, but when that curtain goes down, I am back to being a mom." **CFM**

*NANCY WOZNY, an award-winning dance critic, has contributed to Dance Magazine, Pointe, Dance Spirit, Artshouston, and other publications.*

## See Sara in these upcoming shows

### Of An Era

Brown Theater *Wortham Center* • 501 Texas Ave.  
 7:30 p.m. May 28, 30, and June 5, 6  
 2 p.m. May 31 and June 7  
 Features three ballets: Carousell, Jardí Tancat, and Nosotros

### Swan Lake

Brown Theater *Wortham Center* • 501 Texas Ave.  
 7:30 p.m. June 11, 13, 19, 20  
 2 p.m. June 14, 21, 1:30 p.m. June 13  
 Visit [houstonballet.org](http://houstonballet.org) or call 713-227-2787



Sara Webb (center)

Photo by Amitave Sarkar

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