

= Hee Seo =

Hee Seo ( Hangul : ?? ; hanja : ?? ; born 13 March 1986 ) is a South Korean principal dancer for American Ballet Theatre ( ABT ) , one of the three leading classical ballet companies in the United States . She became the company 's first Korean ballerina to be promoted to principal dancer in ABT 's 75 @-@ year history and is one of only three principal dancers in the company who have worked their way up the ranks from the American Ballet Theatre Studio Company . She is also one of the youngest dancers in ABT history to be promoted to principal at the age of twenty @-@ six . The New York Times has described her style and dancing to " exude an unhurried purity that sums up all that is lovely about ballet " and by Vogue as " unspeakably lissome " . Several critics have noted her style as " lyrical and open " and she has been critically acclaimed for her " humility " and " unique feminine strength " .

Seo began training in Russian ballet at the age of twelve ; a relatively late start for a ballet dancer . Seo has stated on numerous occasions that she did not have aspirations of becoming a professional ballet dancer . Her teachers identified her skills and talents early on and within a short period of time she was offered full scholarships to study abroad at prestigious ballet schools . She gained further notice by winning a scholarship at the 2003 Prix de Lausanne as well as the Grand Prix at the 2003 Youth America Grand Prix .

She was rapidly promoted from the ABT Studio Company and joined the full company in May 2005 . She was again quickly promoted into the corps de ballet in March 2006 and then to soloist in August 2010 before finally being named as principal dancer in July 2012 by Kevin McKenzie , the artistic director of ABT . During her time at ABT , she has performed numerous lead roles in classical and contemporary ballet .

= = Early life = =

Seo was born in Seoul , South Korea . Her mother , aunt , and grandmother all studied fine arts and she , along with her two older and younger brothers , studied piano and took swimming lessons . Seo has stated that one of the reasons she has a strong relationship with her mother was because she did not have a sister .

In middle school , Seo was the student class president and was offered the opportunity to attend an entrance competition for the Sunhwa Arts School . She had been dancing for six months but had not received any formal ballet training . She entered into the competition and was awarded a scholarship to attend the Sunhwa . Initially her parents were against her leaving due to her young age but were persuaded otherwise by one of her teachers . Seo enrolled for one year before leaving to study ballet in a professional training program in the United States .

= = Training and career = =

Seo began her formal dance training at age twelve ; a relatively late start for a ballet dancer . Jillian Laub from movmnt has described Seo as having " the perfect body for ballet " . At thirteen , she was invited to attend and awarded a full three @-@ year scholarship to study under Alla Sizova at the Kirov Academy of Ballet ( formerly the Universal Ballet Academy ) in Washington DC . Seo has often stated Sizova was a major influence and mentor in her life . Jacqueline Akhmedova was also one of her teachers and helped train her for competitions . Akhmedova said , " Seo [ was ] the best student she has ever had " .

Seo won the 2003 Prix de Lausanne Award in Switzerland and was offered a scholarship by Reid Anderson to attend the John Cranko Schule . That same year , Seo won the Grand Prix at the 2003 Youth America Grand Prix . John Meehan asked her to join the American Ballet Theatre Studio Company in the following year where she stayed until joining American Ballet Theatre as an apprentice in May 2005 .

In the beginning , Seo 's transition to the ABT company was difficult . She had trained under the Russian syllabus at Cranko and needed to make the transition to the " American style " . Seo noted

that " the ABT style is to leave the dancers alone . Individual character matters here , and dance that lacks originality cannot survive " . She was able to adapt with the assistance of her mentors who also at the time helped her overcome a serious back injury . In March 2006 , she was promoted to the rank of corps de ballet . She gained significant attention in 2009 when she performed the female lead in MacMillan 's Romeo and Juliet , La Sylphide , and On the Dnieper . She debuted as Juliet on her twenty @-@ third birthday which she has said was " one of [ her ] favorites " .

She became a soloist in August 2010 and principal dancer in July 2012 . She was the first Korean ballerina to be promoted to principal dancer in ABT 's 75 @-@ year history and , at age 26 , one of the company 's youngest dancers to be so promoted . Her promotion drew further attention as Seo was one of only three principal dancers in the company to have been promoted from the ABT Studio Company . Julia Moon , the Ballet Director of Universal Ballet , said that " Seo has an incredible talent , not just in dancing but also acting . I have never doubted that someday she would become a principal dancer at ABT " . Seo has been noted for her " lyrical and open " style and " unique feminine strength " by several critics including The New York Times , Dance Magazine , and KoreAm .

Seo 's debut performance as Principal dancer in 2012 was as Princess Aurora in The Sleeping Beauty and the Swan Queen in Swan Lake . Seo has said that Swan Lake was her most challenging ballet . It is notoriously difficult for its thirty @-@ two fouettés and the lead ballerina having to dance the two contrasting personality roles of Odette , the White Swan , and Odile , the Black Swan . In an interview with Pointe Magazine , Seo said that she " prefers the mental and physical challenge of full @-@ length ballets over repertory works " . In 2014 , Seo had the opportunity to dance several full @-@ length roles in her second year as principal , when three of ABT 's senior principal ballerinas announced their retirement , placing Seo in line for several leading roles .

Seo models for Bloch and wears their pointe shoes . In an interview with the The Wall Street Journal , Seo stated that she " carries three to six new pairs a day and alternates them in class and rehearsals to break them in " and that she " can go through a pair a day once the shoes become too soft to support her feet " .

Her performances are sponsored by Pamela and David B. Ford . Seo resides in Manhattan in New York City .

= = Roles and repertoire at ABT = =

= = = Full length ballets = = =

= = = Other ballets and repertoire = = =