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news | 10 MINUTES WITH...

# Wendy Whelan

The edgy ballerina says good-bye to New York City Ballet and hello to new experiments.

BY WENDY PERRON

Wendy Whelan has practically defined the term "contemporary ballerina." With her crystal-cut shapes and unsentimental, almost spiritual energy, she brings clarity to whatever she dances, whether it's Balanchine, Wheeldon, Ratmansky or McGregor. Her last season with New York City Ballet, which opens September 23, is bound to be bittersweet for many in the ballet world. The sweet part is that after her farewell performance on October 18, she will begin a two-year term as artistic associate at New York City Center and resume her duet project *Restless Creature*, touring 17 U.S. cities in 2015.



In her *Restless Creature* duet with Brian Brooks

**How do you feel when you look back on your 30 years with NYCB?**

It's been the greatest gift of my life. I was really lucky to be chosen for this company and to be noticed by Peter Martins, Jerome Robbins and all the choreographers that have come in and out. I've had a strong body that's kept me injury-free pretty much the whole time so I could get it all in. I tried to eat everything up because it was so nutritious and bountiful.

**What are you planning for October 18?**

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. I have an idea to use each of those elements in my own way—though I might have to forgo the something blue.

**What does your role at City Center entail?**

My residency starts in November. I'll get studio

time and have showings for City Center people and my funders. I'll also partake in studio talks and things like that.

**I hear you'll be working on duets with The Royal Ballet's Edward Watson. Why were you drawn to him?**

Besides being an incredible artist and having the highest level of integrity, he's one of the funniest people I've ever met. He's smart and thoughtful and loves to try new things. He's tireless and I'm like that, too. I'd like to get crazy with Ed. To put something out there and maybe be embarrassed or maybe be like, "That's so cool. I never felt that before!"

**You had hip surgery over a year ago. How is your body holding up?**

In April, I had a hard time walking. I was very

scared. I found out that a spinal stenosis had been causing the pain in my hip this whole time. Two weeks before my return to NYCB, I got relief from an epidural shot. I'm doing core exercises for endurance and it has helped my gait. I don't crumble or break like I did.

For most of my career I didn't think about the food I was putting in my body. I'm on this kick now of eating well. I've cut out sugar and gluten and I'm drinking more water. A dancer is like a fantastic car—a Porsche or a Maserati—and you need to have the best fuel.

**Did injury inspire this transition?**

I actually planned to leave NYCB on my 30-year anniversary for a while. With injury and surgery, it became clearer that my body and mind were really ready for something new. I don't know if I could have said this a year ago, but I'm ready. ■