

Spotlight Feature



Photos by: Sarah Ford

Joy Osmanski

Ballet Dancer Turned Action Star

Dance Mogul Magazine Exclusive Interview >>>

Dance Mogul: What were some of your initial dance inspirations?

Joy O: My first ballet crushes were Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gelsey Kirkland. My family had The Nutcracker on VHS and I watched it over and over. Then Gregory Hines entered the picture because of White Nights, and The Turning Point, and...I'm realizing these all have Baryshnikov in common! Martha Graham and Pina Bausch have also been huge inspirations for me.

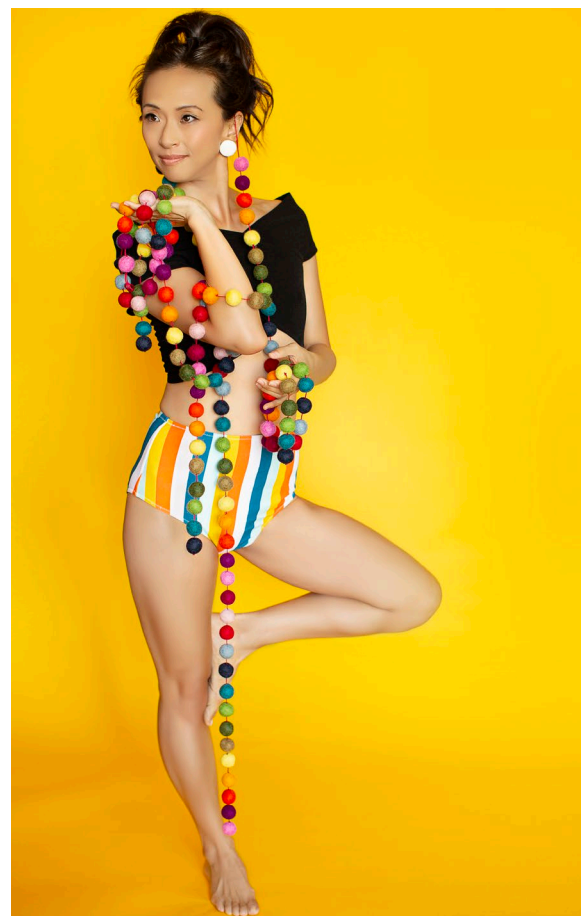
Dance Mogul: How did dance help prepare you to transition into acting, if at all? Do you think your background in dance helped with any of your past or current roles?

Joy O: Dance has been a significant part of my transition into acting. I wasn't athletic, so dance helped give me a sense of teamwork. The experience of learning choreography, moving your body through space in alignment with other bodies – it's incredibly potent. There's an unspoken language between dancers that often involves no eye contact, just a heightened awareness of self and others. Actually, when I was at UCSD in the MFA Acting program, learning how to act, my dance training was a stumbling block at first, because my body had all this habitual behavior related to posture and tension and breath. Much of the vocal and physical training we did at UCSD pushed against that. Ballet dancers aren't supposed to have vocal breathing!

Everything should look effortless. But for an actor, breath is an integral part of technique and character work. So I had to unlearn a lot of physical training. But then dance training gave me the flexibility to explore the physical side of acting in a deeper way. So in the end, dance and acting became a symbiotic relationship that continues today, but in a much less conscious way. I recently shot a role for the Hulu series Monsterland, and really relied on all the training – dance and theatre – that I've received. For me, the more tools in the belt, the better. When you're putting all the pieces of technique together, it can feel self-aware and awkward. But the more you practice, the more it starts to gel into an organic process, and that's the sweet spot.

Joy Osmanski, the alluring, graceful, jovial actor, dancer and mother of three has established herself as one of Hollywood's hardest working entertainers with the release of her two new television series. Starring alongside Amy Poehler, Ty Burrell, Riki Lindhome, and Rashida Jones in FOX's "Duncanville" (airing on Sundays, at 8:30pm ET/PT), as well as the highly-anticipated action series the CW's "Stargirl" (premiering Spring 2020), which cast includes Luke Wilson, and Amy Smart.

Airing during the wildly popular FOX's Animation Domination, "Duncanville" centers around the life of 'Duncan Harris' (Poehler) an average 15-year-old boy, who is always one step away from making a bad decision. Along with Duncan lives his mom 'Annie' (Poehler), a parking enforcement officer, who dreams of being a detective someday and always has to watch Duncan, his dad 'Jack' (Burrell), who tries to be a better father figure to Duncan than his father was to him, his sister Kimberly (Lindhome), who is a normal teenager going through normal teen-phases, and his other adopted sister Jing (Osmanski). 'Jing' is also known as the moral compass of the family at 5 years old.



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Dance Mogul: As a working mother, what is your advice for families during this time and just, in general, have a growing high profile career in this industry?

Joy O: Staying the course as an actor is already an often brutal endeavor. To also be a parent can add a crazy level of pressure. Then you add in a global pandemic, and things fall into sharp focus very, very quickly. All the little stressors of this business, the self-doubt, the criticism, the rejection...for me, it's fallen very quickly by the wayside. Any advice I would give I'd temper with the caveat that this is what is working for our family. Everyone is finding their own ways of coping and thriving. I've found tremendous comfort in making time to connect with people via all the apps. I love seeing my friends' faces and knowing we're all sharing this experience. There's nothing like a catastrophe to bring people together. Sadly, it also seems to bring out hatred and fear, and that brings me great distress. But what I keep seeing over and over is that people are finding

Dance Mogul: Tell us about your new project Duncanville and your upcoming coming project Star Girl, are you nervous about your projects being released during this time?

Joy O: Duncanville is one of those jobs that feels surreal pretty much the entire time. Mike Scully and Julie Thacker Scully and Amy Poehler? I'm in. And can't quite believe that I am. I love that our show is about a fantastically average kid who has a rich fantasy life. That's most of us. And for most of us, the teen years were hardly graceful. Mine were fraught and awkward as hell. So it's pretty great to play the younger sister of a character who probably everyone can relate to.

Stargirl is a hugely personal project for creator Geoff Johns and I feel privileged to be part of the creative team assembled to bring it to life. The DC world is so epic, with such passionate, informed fans, and I hope to learn from them. When I auditioned for the show, I had no idea it was a dual role. I knew Paula was funny and cruel and well-written, but didn't find out until after I was cast that she is also Tigress. And what I love is that Geoff was very clear that Tigress and Sportsmaster are not just two-dimensional supervillains. They're driven by the same motivations as many of us: wanting to protect their family and the future of their community and country. So as an actor, that was immediately relatable, even if my methods would hardly be the same as Paula's. I'm like everyone else right now – hungry for great content, not only as entertainment, but as a legitimate escape from the overwhelming and discouraging state of our world. So yes – I'm thrilled Duncanville and Stargirl can help with that!

small joys in slowing down. In the limits of what we can all do right now. And that incredible kindness and generosity are present.

Dance Mogul: What advice do you have for dancers at this time?

Joy O: Dancing, like acting, is communal. I have no doubt that dancers all over the world are mourning their loss of daily routine and habits of gathering. But I love seeing videos of dancers doing barre in their living rooms, or continuing to rehearse in whatever ways they can. Artists are nothing if not resilient, and I would just encourage dancers to keep the faith, and trust that creative evolution will be an inevitable result of this time.

Dance Mogul: What else can we expect from you in the future?

Joy O: Hopefully, just more relative sanity. Ha! One of my greatest fears is that I look back on this time and am ashamed or regretful about how I behaved. I don't mean wearing sweats every day and en-

joying foods and letting my kids watch more TV, because that stuff's all good. I mean becoming so cynical and angry that my natural desire for optimism and kindness becomes overwhelmed. I'm finding the fine line between staying informed and keeping my faith in humanity.

Dance Mogul: Is there anyone you would like to thank for helping you thus far?

Joy O: I have been fortunate to have so many wonderful teachers, friends and mentors. For me, there were some key people in my childhood who inspired me to pursue a life in the arts. My parents were always huge supporters of any artistic pursuit. And I had a wonderful piano teacher, Robin Watson, who gave me such steady, creative, respectful training. And then, all of my professors at UCSD were and are a very present voice in my work. I'm so grateful for all of the excitement and evolution I've experienced as a student. Thank you, so much, to all.