

## After Living Her Dream, Dancer Danica Paulos Plans to Photograph the World

By: Paul Hoggins

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As a young girl growing up in Huntington Beach, Danica Paulos pursued two passions: dance and photography. She never dreamed at the time that she would excel in both before she even turned 20.

Paulos, now 26, will perform with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Los Angeles later this month. One of America's pre-eminent dance troupes, it has been her home since shortly after she graduated from high school and this season will be her last with the company.

"I love Ailey so much; it means the world to me," said Paulos. "Dancing with them has been my dream since I was so young. And I achieved it at such a young age. It was the first real dance job I had right out of school."

Paulos caught dance fever while she was attending Huntington Beach High School. "I was a part of the Academy for the Performing Arts there. I was in the ballet program and the modern dance program as well. I was also training pretty intensively outside of high school, mainly at the O.C. Dance Center."

Paulos left HBHS before graduating to complete her education in New York City, where she trained at the Professional Performing Arts School and The Ailey School on scholarship. While performing with Ailey II, the apprentice company, she received a prestigious young artists' award from the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts. She joined Ailey's main company in 2014.



Paulos has been featured prominently in choreography by Ailey and the company's current artistic director, Robert Battle. At the Music Center, she'll be dancing in performances of Ode, Ounce of Faith, Busk and Revelations.

"I really love dancing Revelations," Paulos said. "I'm in 'Fix Me Jesus' (a slow and solemn pas de deux). I just started doing it this season. It's been a dream of mine to dance that role. And to close out my career with it is something so special I can't quite explain it."

In addition to her busy dancing career, Paulos has also found steady work as a model for several industries. She modeled "dance-floor-ready" shoes for Refinery29 and swimsuits for an Elle magazine photo spread. She was also featured on the cover of Dance Magazine for its 2015 "25 to Watch" issue.



But it's on the other side of the camera that Paulos found another passion — and, more recently, a second budding career. She has become an in-demand dance photographer. If you're curious about her work, she provides a window into the Ailey dancers' world as the principal photographer for the company's Instagram account.

"I've always been interested in photography," Paulos said. "When I was in high school, I took a photo class as a freshman. That's what began this whole entire thing."

Paulos' interest was given wings when her grandparents bought her a professional-quality camera. "Then after moving to New York and opening up my more artistic self, I had more opportunities to explore my art."

Paulos didn't approach the Ailey company about photographing dancers. But her talents as a shooter didn't go unnoticed.

"During my first year with the company, people were noticing that I had this artistic eye. They asked me to take over the Instagram account and share things with the Ailey's many followers." Shortly afterwards, Paulos started running the

company's Instagram account. "I've been doing that for a few years, and it's another dream job. I have access to beautiful, talented dancers and world travel."

Dance photography is an exacting specialty, requiring a set of skills that often elude even accomplished photographers. Paulos acknowledged it's helpful to be a dancer when shooting photos of them.

"One of the secrets is definitely to make your dancers feel comfortable. Also, you must know when is the right moment to capture the shot. Often you have photographers who aren't familiar with dancers, so they don't know when to shoot. You have to watch out for certain things. Is the leg completely straight? Where are the arms and chest going to look their best? Where should the face be focused? I can say to a dancer, 'Bring your right shoulder around, focus your face toward the light.' I'm able to capture the perfect moment. Being a dancer and feeling what it's like to be in the right pose really helps."

Paulos is too young and too passionately engaged in her interests to retire. But she has decided to take some time off from dancing to explore the world with her new husband, Lukasz Ziba, a dancer whom she met at the Ailey School.

"I'm going to backpack around the world with my husband. It will be a much different route than I'm on now. It's going to be a really beautiful exploration. Who else am I? Who else can I be?"

Paulos isn't turning her back on dance. "I will always incorporate dance into my life, but I want to develop my other skills and interests. But I can't tell you exactly what the next chapter looks like yet."

Paulos and her husband begin their world travels in July. "Our first stop is Poland, where my husband is from. Then we're on to Spain, Finland, Egypt, India, Thailand. After that, who knows?"

Paulos is planning on keeping an Instagram diary of her trip. You can follow her here: [@danicapaulos](#)