

From Nureyev and Fonteyn to pilates

SHE danced with Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn, shared a dressing room with Monica Mason and was the subject of a Robert Heindel painting at the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition.

But Pippa Wylde turned her back on the glamour of the ballet stage nearly 20 years ago and now teaches pilates in the depths of the Hampshire countryside north of Alton.

The one-time globe-trotting senior soloist with the Royal Ballet has done it all.

Having joined the London Royal Ballet Company aged 17, one of the youngest ever, and danced roles such as Giselle, Odette in *Swan Lake*, and the Lilac Fairy in *Sleeping Beauty* partnering Nureyev, Pippa also worked with the world's most talented choreographers including Sir Kenneth MacMillan, Sir Frederick Ashton and Michael Corder.

They were heady days of celebrity, the stuff of dreams, but Pippa has never regretted leaving the stage while still in her early thirties, and since then, she has barely danced.

Her ballet tights have been given to friends' ballet dancing daughters, her ballet shoes disintegrated and have been thrown out, and for more than a decade, she worked as a secretary.

These days, she couldn't be happier treading boards in her own pilates studio in Herriard, and helping others to achieve the fitness and poise that is second nature to her.

Pippa embarked on her new career with the same dedication and enthusiasm that got her to the top as a ballerina, but unlike ballet, stress and competitiveness are not inevitable companions in the world of pilates.

She took her final bow in 1989. The glamour, discipline and comradeship had all been sustaining positives, but in the end the negatives became too obvious.

The glamour had begun to wane, competitiveness led to friendships sometimes failing, and Pippa realised that she had gone as far as she could go.

"I wasn't a favourite of anybody's although I was given lots of lovely roles, but I knew my limitations and I knew I would never be a Margot Fonteyn. I knew I could only go so far."

"I just wish I'd been stronger. You need a strong mental attitude and real self-belief that you can do anything."

"I probably didn't push myself enough but that's all in hindsight. When I hit 30 I knew that if I didn't leave then, I would have found it hard to find something else to do."

"Margot Fonteyn went on into her sixties. Darcy Bussell has retired. Monica Mason is now director of the Royal Ballet. Rudolph went on too long. You either go into teaching or you completely leave and have nothing to do with it. Or you stay and go into character roles or choreography. People like that love it so much, they can't give it up."

"I learnt to type and do office work. I learnt about business, book-keeping, which was all good. It was part of a path we all go down to finish our development."

The years as a top ballet dancer led Pippa into the world of pilates. The regime, with its



Pippa dancing with one of her favourite partners, Jonathan Cope

proven combination of strength and flexibility unlike no other form of exercise or movement, perfectly fulfilled her aim to stay fit, and after 18 years practising the method, she opened her first studio in Cliddesden near Basingstoke in 2003.

Happily married and with her new career burgeoning, Pippa Wylde knows that she left the stage at the right time, and is grateful that she has found a perfect niche using her dance talents, and the business acumen she picked up in her secretarial work.

Left with just the memories, the photographs of her on stage which adorn her studio, and occasional broadcasts on the Performing Arts Channel of her past performances, Pippa says emphatically and with some wonder: "I dream about it still, but I don't miss it. I do look on it with real fondness, but I also think, 'did I really do it?'"

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