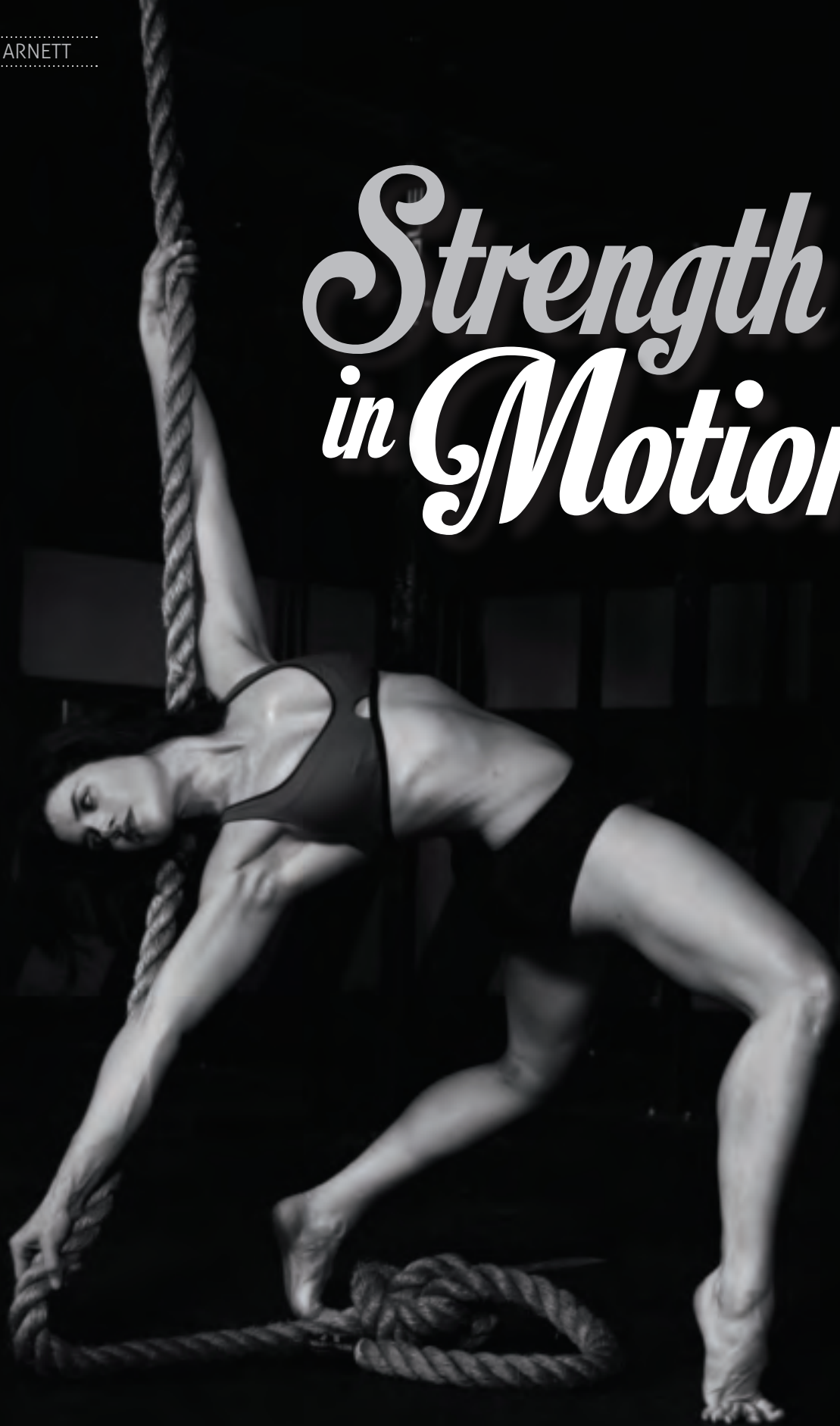


Strength in Motion



Choreographer Sarah Wildes Arnett stays on the move

by DEAN POLING

Seeing Sarah Wildes Arnett work with Valdosta State University dance students, or dance on stage, or lift 300 pounds, or lead a CrossFit class, it's hard to imagine her choosing a career dealing with insurance claims.

Yet, briefly, armed with a degree in American Studies from Vanderbilt, she entered the insurance industry. Nothing wrong with selecting insurance as a career, it just wasn't for her.

Her mother, Lisa Sharp, had been a dancer, a stay-at-home mom and a dance teacher, Arnett said. Sharp didn't discourage her daughter from dancing but she did encourage her to study something else at school.

So, she followed the advice, got her degree peering into the sociological ramifications behind American history, and ended up handling insurance claims.

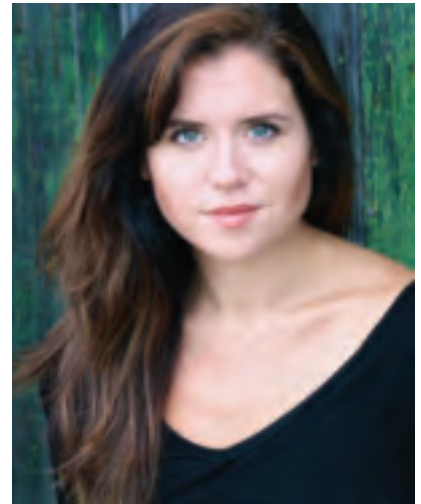
Arnett smiles now in the remembering but described the experience as "terrible."

She wanted to do something else. She wanted to work in dance.

Arnett enrolled in the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She earned a master's of fine arts in dance.

At college, she was introduced to choreography in an unexpected way.

Studying dance, she also entered the university's drum and corps line, a competitive music group that traveled most weekends to competitions. She was also



in a dance group that demanded a certain level of participation to maintain membership. With the weekly musical group trips and rehearsals, Arnett couldn't rehearse consistently as a dancer. She turned to choreography to keep her place in the dance group.





Instead of being a place holder, choreography became a passion for her. A creative outlet. A creative challenge.

Inspiration can come from anywhere. She has no set pattern to create a dance.

“Every dance is different,” Arnett said of developing the choreography of her dances. “Sometimes, I’m listening to a song, or reading a book, or watching the news.”

Sometimes, the choreography comes to her fully formed. Other times, she develops the choreography with dancers in the dance studio.

Arnett’s choreographic notes look like advanced mathematical

formulae methodically recorded in pencil on notebook pages. She videotapes developing choreography.

Her forte: modern and contemporary dance.

For the past four years, Arnett has taught dance at VSU. She choreographs dances such as “Ignus et Pluvia” and “Behind Closed Doors,” which were her offerings in the VSU dance concert this past fall.

She has danced in the concerts and continues dancing. She has been a dance coach and dancer in past seasons of Peach State Summer Theatre.

For the past year, Arnett has participated in CrossFit, an exer-

cise program that challenges participants through a combination of Olympic-style weightlifting, gymnastics, calisthenics, running, etc.

In recent months, Arnett has become a CrossFit Level 1 trainer at Crossfit Winnersville.

CrossFit is a good fit for Arnett.

She has been an aerobics instructor. She likes new challenges.

“Nobody’s good at CrossFit,” she said. “There’s always something new. There’s always a new challenge.”

In the period leading to CrossFit, she told Jordan Arnett, her husband of seven years who is a Valdosta Early College Acad-

emy teacher and a realtor, that she wanted something to challenge her and introduce her to new people.

A challenge of living in a new town, a small town, for Arnett was finding a sense of community.

She credits Kelly Barcol, the father of a VSU Theatre student and owner of Crossfit Winnersville, with introducing her to CrossFit.

She went from trying it out to becoming a regular to competing to becoming a certified instructor within a year.

She had found her community. She had found her challenge. She had found a new way to compete.

“It’s been a really positive thing for me,” Arnett said.

CrossFit has also had a positive impact on her dance work.

“My stamina in class has improved,” she said. “I used to be out of breath during dance classes. Now, I never tire in class.”

And that’s after a workout and teaching CrossFit classes as early as 5 a.m. many days. She adjusts her CrossFit schedule to fit her VSU teaching schedule.

“I like to keep busy.” **VS**



Sarah Wildes Arnett dances with her mother and sister. photo by Steve Clarke



Sarah Wildes Arnett choreographs mostly contemporary and modern dance, but she also regularly serves as a dance captain and as a dancer in the musicals of Peach State Summer Theatre. Here, she dances, left, in a scene from PSST! production of Disney's "The Little Mermaid."

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