

Joy Womack
The White Swan

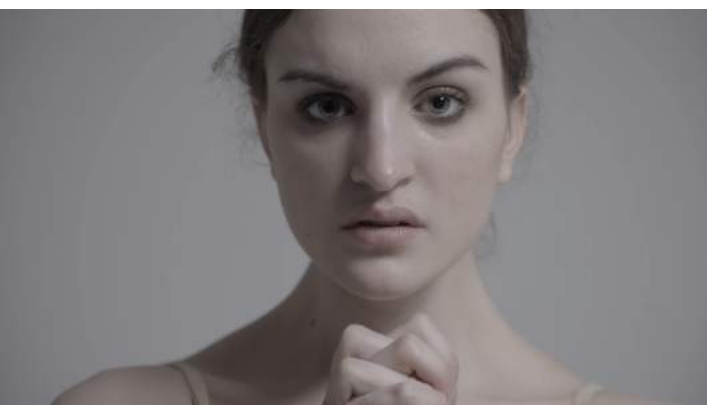
*To be the best, she had to
sacrifice everything.*



SYNOPSIS

Exclusive access documentary about a famous American ballet dancer Joy Womack - an American girl from Texas who had a dream to become a Bolshoi ballet dancer – and the harsh realities of what it takes to become a prima ballerina.

Joy grew up in a typical American family. She always wanted to be a ballet dancer and moved to Russia when she was 15 to follow her dream. Without a word of Russian, not completely fit for the physical requirements of Russian ballet dancers, Joy shows her strength and dedication to ballet and accomplishing her dreams. We follow Joy's personal and professional life: from her daily challenges, injuries, performances to becoming a ballet dancer with Bolshoi Theatre group and then prima ballerina of Kremlin Ballet, where she has performance of her lifetime - Swan Lake. At the same time we learn the harsh realities of the ballet system, the competitive world where to succeed dancers have to sacrifice almost everything including their health and personal life... and even that is not a guarantee for success.



DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

Dina Burlis and Sergey Gavrilov

Dina Burlis

Like every little Russian girl, I grew up dazzled by the magical, fairytale world of classical Russian ballet. It wasn't until I became an adult, though, that I came to understand that the rest of the world is equally mesmerized by my native country's most famous and revered cultural institution.

It's for that reason that, for my debut directorial endeavor, I decided I would tell a Russian ballet story -- and when I met Joy, I realized I had found the perfect subject. The notion of following a bright, passionate American girl as she attempted to achieve her dreams in cold, stern and often unforgiving Russia immediately captivated me. I also knew that following this young Californian as she set out on her make-it-or-break-it journey was a wonderful way to show an international audience just what it takes to achieve success on the most demanding ballet stage in the world. I understood, as well, that it would allow me to highlight the dedication, commitment and sacrifice necessary for these magnificent ballet dancers to achieve such perfect performances.

What I hadn't anticipated, however, was that while filming Joy's highs and lows over a seven-year-period, her story would become so personally meaningful to me and her experience would so closely mirror many of the issues that I found myself facing as a woman in Russia. Following Joy as she confronted -- and fought against -- a society where women are expected to be dependent, obedient and submissive was refreshing and liberating. She became a role model, inspiring me with her unquenchable ambition and her unconstrained demand for personal expression. I soon found my own life changing as a result of witnessing her courage and fortitude. I would very much like the audience to feel the same after watching this film.

Sergey Gavrilov

I had been looking for a ballet story to film when Dina approached me with the idea of making a documentary about Joy. As a photographer and cinematographer, I am always looking for stories I can tell through stunning, provocative and truthful images. I got that in abundance with Joy, who so graciously allowed us capture her backstage life and gave us a peek behind the curtain into a world the audience isn't normally allowed to see.

For me, the most fascinating part of telling this story was that we had the rare opportunity to document a ballerina's journey from almost the very beginning of her career. We were allowed to watch this driven but naïve teenager grow up before our eyes. We were able observe Joy as she confronted an environment that wasn't always very welcoming. And yet she somehow still managed to overcome all obstacles and develop into a truly independent and resilient woman and a real prima ballerina.



ABOUT THE FILM

Russian ballet dancers traditionally travel West, like Vaslav Nijinsky or Rudolf Nureyev. But in this film, the journey is turned on its head, as we follow an aspiring American ballet dancer as she heads east to follow her dreams on the Russian stage.

Dina Burlis and Sergey Gavrilov followed Joy's life in Russia for over seven years, shooting more than 1,000 hours of footage. During that time, they followed her from her graduation from Bolshoi Ballet Academy until she left Russia to pursue her career in South Korea and then later in the United States.



FEATURING

Joy Womack

Nikita Ivanov-Goncharov, ex-husband of Joy

Nikita studied at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy with Joy. They got married immediately after graduation, then danced together at the Bolshoi Theater and later in the Kremlin Ballet.

Natalia Goncharova

Nikita's mother, art director of Grim Massa Theater

Elizabeth Shvedenko

Elizabeth is an American reporter who had been fascinated by Russia since childhood. She moved to Russia and while living there, she met Joy and became her biographer. She now lives in Minnesota with her husband, whom she met in Russia, and their two kids.

Tatiana Kuznetsova

Tatiana is a preeminent Russian ballet critic working at Kommersant, one of the leading Russian newspapers. Her opinion is highly valued and sought after in the Russian ballet world.



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