

The Freedom to

BY ADAM C. OLSON
Church Magazines

The ballerina glides across the stage—spiraling, spinning, then springing into the air so easily it’s as if she caught gravity napping. She is in every movement a fluid expression of freedom.

Like many little girls, when Maria Victoria Rojas Rivera of Chile—Mavi to her friends—was four years old, she decided she wanted to become a ballerina. And like all of those other little girls, she quickly discovered that the grace and freedom she saw on the stage came at a pretty steep price. The effort and discipline required to become a professional ballerina are too much for many young dreamers.

The Cost of Dreams

“When you’re little, you don’t understand the sacrifice it takes,” Mavi says. “When I started studying at age 10, our

Rules can seem restrictive, but obedience allows Mavi to soar.

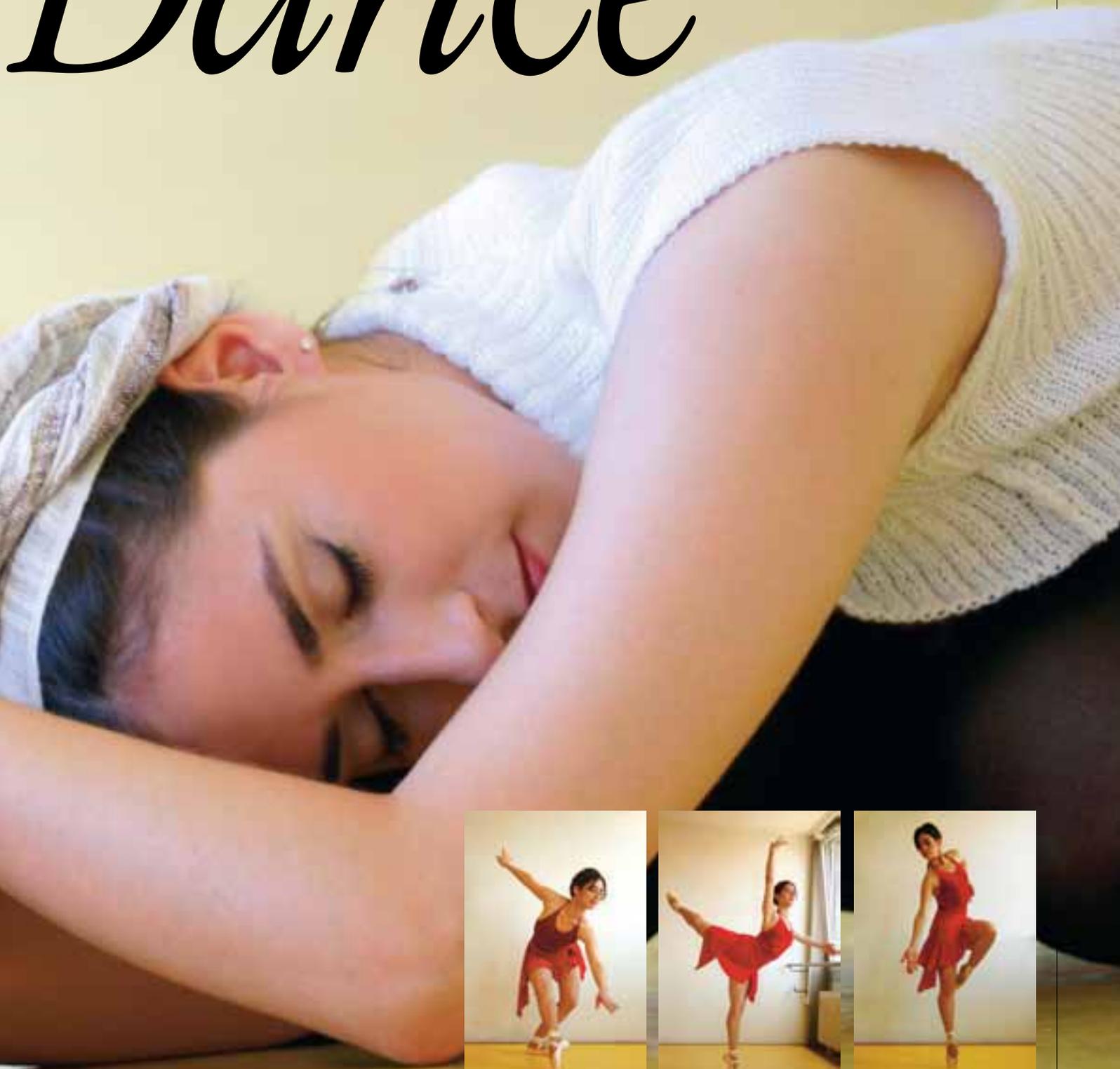
teachers told us that half of our lives would be spent dancing. We’d have to give up a lot of things.”

Things like free time and certain foods. Mavi would have to put a lot of time and effort into exercising and practicing. She’d have to watch carefully what she ate. And after schoolwork and dance, there wouldn’t be much time for friends.

Mavi decided that her dream was important enough to her to try.

“The teenage years can be a complicated time,” she says. “My friends didn’t always understand why I wouldn’t eat certain things or stay out late with them.”

Dance





The Price of Freedom

Mavi learned early on that what appeared to be restrictions on her freedom were actually the only way she could free herself from things that would keep her from her goal.

“I chose not to stay out late, and I chose to spend time practicing instead of going to the mall with my friends,” Mavi says. “If I was tired because I stayed out too late or if I didn’t know the steps because I didn’t practice, I couldn’t dance.”

That kind of discipline isn’t easy, but Mavi says it is worth it.

“Everyone has moments when you want to give in,” Mavi confesses, “but you have the power to choose. Discipline can appear restrictive, but self-discipline is a choice. And I chose to accept this lifestyle in order to dance.”

A More Long-Term Goal

At some point during her drive to become a ballerina, Mavi realized that dancing was not the only goal she had or the only worthwhile thing she would need to sacrifice for.

Along the way, she gained a desire to follow Jesus Christ, and she realized that what ballet had taught her about discipline applies to gospel discipleship as well. Just as her friends had wondered why she would do what she did for dance, they asked why she lived such restrictive gospel principles.

“I explained that we have the liberty to choose, and I chose to accept this lifestyle in order to be free from sin and have the Holy Ghost with me,” she says.

Or as the Savior said it, a disciple must “take up his cross,” meaning to deny oneself all ungodliness and every worldly lust and to keep God’s commandments (see Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 16:26). Such self-discipline brings us to “liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator,” while trying to live outside the commandments leads to “captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27).

“Obedience brings greater freedom and peace than anything,” Mavi says. “My goals aren’t limited to this earthly life but include eternity.”

Worth the Sacrifice

Mavi floats across the stage like a leaf carried by the current, stretching and flowing from one move to the next—*développé* and *pirouette*, *glissade* and *grand jeté*.

A ballerina can make her body move in ways that would hurt most other people. This freedom of movement is essential for communicating with the audience. But even though a good ballerina makes every move look effortless on stage, she has put in a lot of effort off the stage.

After eight years of sacrifice and hours of training almost every day, she was living her dream on stage—and in the gospel.

“People think it looks so beautiful and graceful,” Mavi says. “But the movements are very controlled. It takes a lot of strength to control yourself like that.”

The gospel parallel is important. Following Christ takes strength. And the rewards are sweet.

“The rewards from so many sacrifices are that I can dance,” Mavi says. “I feel strong,

and I feel the guidance of the Holy Ghost in every step I take—on stage and off.”

Not Done Dancing

According to Nephi, once we’ve felt the desire to follow Christ and have been baptized and confirmed, we must still endure to the end (see 2 Nephi 31:19–20). For Mavi, ballet requires similar dedication.

After dancing in Paraguay, she returned to Viña del Mar, Chile, to teach for a few years. Now she wants to take her dancing to the next level. She has set new goals that have taken her to Argentina, Germany, Ireland, and Spain to study and audition with different ballet companies.

She knows she must continue to strive—both on the stage and in the gospel. She must continue with discipline if she wants the freedom to dance. And she must continue in faith if she wants the freedom that comes from discipleship. “If ye continue in my word,” the Lord taught, “then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). ■



DANCING WITH WISDOM

Mavi has to put in a lot of effort off the stage to stay healthy and in shape. Aside from watching what she eats and getting enough rest, Mavi exercises a lot, and she dances at least five hours almost every day. But she doesn’t take care of herself just because she’s a dancer.

“As a member of the Church, I understand that my body is the temple of my spirit. As an artist, I need every part of

my body to work right, so I protect it as best as I can. But as a member, I already knew I should do that.”

Her testimony of the Word of Wisdom’s inspired nature has been strengthened by her experience with ballet. “When you

treat your body right, you can tell,” she says.

You have to take care of yourself to be a ballerina, but Mavi says, “We should all take care of our bodies, even if we aren’t dancers. We don’t get to choose our bodies, but we should all be grateful for and take care of what we have been given. They are gifts from God, and we’ve each been given our body for a purpose.”

