

STARS OF THE ENGLISH NATIONAL BALLET YONAH ACOSTA AND LAURRETTA SUMMERSCALES TELL OF THEIR LOVE AND WEDDING PLANS



They have just started rehearsals for *Swan Lake*, the classic ballet loved for its high drama and tragic romance, but real-life couple Yonah Acosta and Laurretta Summerscales couldn't be further removed from the lovelorn prince and his ill-fated Swan Queen.

In the past six months the principal dancers with the English National Ballet (ENB) have bought a place together, become engaged and started planning their wedding next August. Yonah – nephew of Cuban ballet legend Carlos – and Laurretta will welcome their families from Cuba and the UK at Great Fosters, a luxurious 16th-century mansion hotel in Surrey.

It almost didn't happen, though – Yonah's attempt at a romantic proposal last November was embarrassing, he says. He'd bought the ring – a tiara-shaped gold band set with diamonds – two months earlier and had carefully planned how he was going to present it. But nerves got the better of him.

"What do you think of this?" he blurted out one day when he and his girlfriend were in the kitchen.

"I was getting the fish out of the freezer," says Laurretta. "I turned around and he was there, just holding it. I said, 'What do you mean, 'What do you think?' Is it a ring for me? For somebody else? Is it the ring?' If he was kneeling, I'd have got it, but he was standing up. I had to ask him, 'Are you proposing?' and he said, 'Yes.' I was really happy but I didn't actually get to say yes."

SWEET TALK

Laurretta, 25, says she and Yonah, 26, are similar. "We have a lot of energy, and we're feisty." But it's easy to spot the contrasts – Laurretta is chatty and direct, whereas Yonah, who has the same smile as his uncle Carlos, is quieter – in part because he's not speaking his native language.

In fact they barely spoke to each other when Yonah – who grew up in Cuba, like his uncle – joined the company in 2011. Two ▶

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I call you, you'll be the best in your class.' Sometimes I'd say, 'I don't want to do class again, it's hard,' and he said, 'If you think you can do it, you'll be able to.' So from then on I changed my attitude." Five months later he was top of his class.

Laurretta started even earlier than Yonah, taking tap and modern dance classes at her mother's dance school at the tender age of three, before focusing on ballet and joining the ENB dance school at 16, graduating straight to the company without having to audition.

Would she say she's risen quickly through the ranks? "I suppose so," she says, shyly. "Some people are principals when they're 19, but I'm very happy with the way my career has gone."

A WOMAN OF PRINCIPAL

Her promotion to principal dancer happened very publicly on her birthday in January, at the end of a performance of *Le Corsaire*.

As the company took its bows, ENB artistic director Tamara Rojo came on

stage. "It was a very special moment," smiles Laurretta. "I think it's one that will always be there."

The pair's immediate focus is *Swan Lake* at London's Royal Albert Hall in June. Different dancers will take the lead roles during the 12-day run, but while Laurretta will play Odette and Yonah will be Prince Siegfried, they won't perform together. The pair seldom do, but "it's a great feeling" when they can, says Laurretta.

As plans for their 2017 wedding get under way, Yonah says: "I'm looking forward to growing old together and dividing our time between here and Cuba." Laurretta, meanwhile, wants to appreciate what she has.

"I'm always going for the next thing, trying to be better," she says. "But I think I should enjoy life while it's really good, to reflect on what I have and be really thankful." **H**

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Laurretta and Yonah (on stage with his uncle, ballet legend Carlos in 2014, below) are just as happy in each other's company whether at home or on stage. The couple rarely perform together, as they did at a ballet gala in Singapore in May (right) but love it when they do. "It's a great feeling," Laurretta tells us.

