

Dancer accepted into prestigious NYC school

By Julie Slack
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Mili Gomez nervously clasps her bright coral, nail-polished fingers together, then unclasps them a moment later.

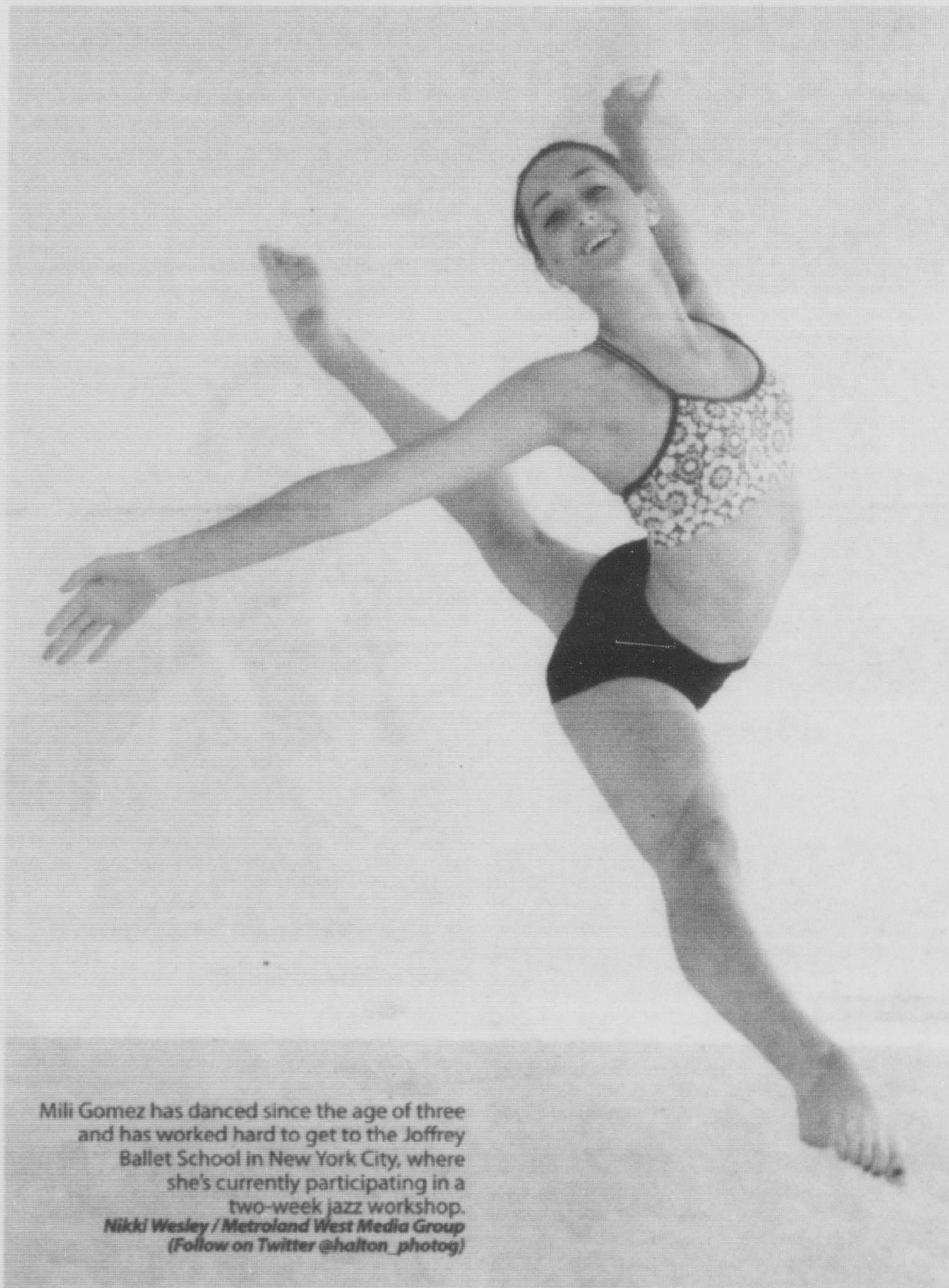
Clad in dance gear, brunette hair in a neatly-combed bun, the 16-year-old Miltonian takes a moment out of her busy day teaching a group of youngsters at Artistic Dance Scene in Oakville to talk about an opportunity of a lifetime that she has been given.

Though humble about her ability, the young dancer admits she's a bundle of nerves thinking about spending this week and next at New York City's Joffrey Ballet School in Greenwich Village.

Mili was selected from thousands of dancers to attend the two-week workshop, jazz contemporary — intensive. In addition, she was offered a \$5,000 scholarship to the school's fall full-time program, which offers education, room and board and dance instruction. Her dance instructor, Kristy Baggetta, speaks with pride about the youngster's skills as well as her shyness.

"As a dancer, she's unbelievably talented," she said. "She listens to the music and dances with her heart. She's very determined and loyal; she's dedicated, but she is shy and doesn't realize where she can go with this talent. She's not like other dancers who are in love with themselves."

In fact, her modesty to her talent is why Baggetta herself sent Mili's audition tape to Jof-



Mili Gomez has danced since the age of three and has worked hard to get to the Joffrey Ballet School in New York City, where she's currently participating in a two-week jazz workshop.
Nikki Wesley / Metroland West Media Group
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frey Ballet School, where in its 60-year history, graduates have gone on to dance for major classical ballet companies around the world, without the teen even knowing.

"She thought it was crazy to apply," she said, and even crazier when she got accepted. Some

1,500 dancers from all over the globe apply for the opportunity, but only 400 are selected.

"She called me the moment she heard she was accepted and said, 'I got in, what do I do?'" Baggetta said. "This is every dancer's dream... this is like a hockey player making it to the NHL."

Baggetta said Mili, who's a Bishop Reding Secondary School student, is everyone's role model at the dance school where she has trained for the last three years.

Even her two younger sisters who attend the same school look to her as a role model and both say they would love to be doing what Mili is — someday.

"She never gives 50 per cent effort...it's always 175 per cent effort in everything she does," said Baggetta.

Both agree that when they first met, it was an instant bond. "She's like my kid or like my husband...we complete each other's sentences," said Baggetta, who's a married mom with two young sons.

Mili said she's not sure she wants to attend Joffrey's full-time fall program, especially since it means she'll be away from her instructor and her family, who she says provide her much love and support.

"I have no idea what to expect and it makes me nervous," she admitted.

She's doubtful she will be swayed to stay, despite the school contacting her several times "begging me to accept the offer."

Baggetta thinks Mili will change her mind following her two-week experience, and she's encouraging her to take a leap of faith and stay at the school.

"I think she'll experience the New York City rush," she said. "I think it will change the calibre of her dance."

While in New York, Mili will also be taking advantage of another scholarship she earned through her dancing this year.

She'll participate in 10 hours of classes at Steps on Broadway on weekends or evenings.

Mili's no stranger to competition or travel. In 2010, Mili, who comes with a varied repertoire, dancing jazz, acro-jazz, tap, lyrical/contemporary and ballet, competed with the national dance team at the World Dance Championships in Germany.

She also received a full scholarship at Canada's National Ballet School in Toronto. She competed in New York City along with a host of other cities across Canada and the U.S. in the past.

She said dance is her entire life and something she's worked hard at since she



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