By Hart Seely
Staff writer

Early on, Aisha Mitchell found that she loved to dance. And the 2003 Nottingham High School graduate has never stopped. In 2008, she joined the renowned Alvin Ailey Dance Theater in New York City. Mitchell is currently performing in the Ailey company’s winter-holiday series, which runs through January.

But one of her coolest moments — at least lately — happened on a page rather than a stage. Mitchell posed — if that is right word — for a shot in photographer Jordan Matter’s “Dancers Among Us: A Celebration of Joy in the Everyday” (Workman Publishing Co., 2012).

The book is a collection of photos that depict dancers intervening on otherwise mundane scenes of American life. Look closely above at Mitchell’s arching leap in “Head Over Heels,” and you might wonder: How did they do it?

The dancer spoke via phone from New York City.

Joel, is that a real shoe store?

I’m going to refrain from saying the store’s name, but, yeah, it took place in a mall in West Nyack. That day, I was unprepared for the shoot. I didn’t have the clothes Jordan wanted me to wear. So I was, “OK, I’m going to grab an outfit!” And he was, “Sure, just make sure it’s bright, colorful clothes.” So he’s in this store, looking at his son, who is about 6, while I try on clothes and grab a quick outfit. When I come out, he says, “Let’s try to shoot right here, if we don’t get caught.”

So I turn around, and there’s this big illuminated shoe rack, with all these fun neon-colored shoes, stuff like that — and one pair of heels. I say, “OK, I see where you’re going.” And we went with it.

You just started shooting?

We just started shooting. At first, we tried to be a little reserved, not make a commotion, not draw attention — which is hard, because we’re in the middle of a clothing store in a big mall.

So those people, they’re not model? They look a bit dazed?

Yeah, they’re like, “What is this girl doing?”

Jordan is taking about 10 shots at a time, and whenever an employee walks by, he tries to hide this massive camera, all while trying to get his son to play in the corner. We go like that for about 20 minutes, when we start to realize that none of the employees seem concerned. I mean, nobody’s telling us to stop. So we just dive right in.

How many times did you make that leap?

I’m going to say, 50-plus times. Because the thing about Jordan’s work is that he doesn’t use Photoshop or anything like that. You’re very high off the ground. That’s a running leap, right?

No. No. That’s a natural leg spring. That’s how we dance.

Wow. Your hand is outstretched, the shoe perfectly balanced. Did you try a bunch of poses?

No, it was actually very specific. I had shot with Jordan previously at the (Jacob K.) Javitz Center, for a book convention. We were promoting Jordan’s book before its release. I was doing the exact same pose, but holding a mock-up copy of Jordan’s book. The publishers didn’t want to include it in his actual book, so Jordan asked me to redo the shoot in a different location. So we started with that pose and worked to make it happen.

What was the most physically difficult part of the leap?

I think it was having my hand steady, as a platform, holding the shoe.

Any slight jiggle, and it wouldn’t work?

Right. And if the angle was just a little askew, it wouldn’t have the same effect.

Did those people ever ask what you were doing?

No. At the end, Jordan was like, “Maybe we can use the shot with them.” He went over and asked for their permission.

Were you self-conscious? Was there a crowd?

No, there wasn’t a crowd. Believe it or not,
Battling Obesity

Black women take charge with dialogue, action

By Stacy A. Anderson
The Associated Press

N

de canoe Parker was motivated by frustration. For Star Jones,
narrowly escaped a new start after a bad breakup.

All three have launched individual campaigns that reflect an emerging

gility for African-American women finding creative ways to combat the

obesity epidemic that threatens their longevity.

African-American women have the highest obesity rate of any group of

Americans. Poor out of five black women have a body mass index above

25 percent, which is defined as overweight or obese, according to the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

By comparison, nearly two-thirds of Americans overall are in this
category, the CDC said.

Many black women seem to be bothered that they are generally heavier

than other Americans.

Calorie-rich, traditional soul food is a staple of the diet for many

Americans, and curvy black women are encouraged positively through

praising them as "black" with a "little meat on their bones," or through

songs like the Commodores' "Brick House" or "Boogie Night" by Destiny's

Child. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation and The Washing-

ton Post before this year found that 66 percent of overweight black women
died of self-esteem, while 41 percent of average-sized or thin women had

had high self-esteem.

Still, that doesn't mean black women reject the need to become

healthier.

Historically black, all-female Spelman College in Atlanta is disbanding

its NCAA teams and devoting those resources to a campus-wide wellness

program. In an open letter announcing Spelman's "wellness revolution,

president Beverly Daniel Tatum cited a campus analysis that found many of

Spelman's 2,100 students already have high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes,
or other chronic ailments.

"Spelman has an opportunity to change the health trajectory of our stu-
dents and, through their influence, the communities from which they come,"
Tatum's letter said.

Jones, who underwent open heart surgery in 2010 at age 47 and now

choices. 

Nutritionist and author Rozenn M. Brock, known professionally as Dr.
Ro, agrees with Jones. She said getting active is only about 20 percent of
the fight against obesity. The rest revolves around how much people eat.

"Our plates are killing us," she said.

Brock said "food deserts," or urban areas that lack quality supermarkets,
are a real obstacle. She suggested getting around that by shopping with
neighbors to store with areas in high-quality grocery options or buying
food in bulk. She also suggested growing


TV PERSONALITY Star Jones is shown above left in 2005 and then above
right in 2012. Jones underwent open heart surgery three years ago at age 47
and now urges awareness about heart disease among black women.

who advocated publicly that women must stop allowing concern about

their hair to prevent them from exercising.

Some black women visit salons as often as every two weeks, investing
several hours and anywhere from $50 to hundreds of dollars each visit—an
activity that, according to the Black Owned Beauty Supply Association,
helps fuel a $10 billion black hair care and cosmetics industry.

In an interview during a health con-

ference in Washington last week, Ben-
jamin said the damage sweat can in-
fire on costly hairstyles can affect
women's willingness to work out, and
she hopes to change that. She goes
to beauty industry conferences to en-
courage stylists to create exercise-friendly
hairstyles.

"I wouldn't say we use it as an ex-
cuse, we use it as a barrier," Benjamin
said. "And that's not one of the bar-
riers anymore. We're always going to
have problems with balancing our
lives, but we could take that one out."

Parler, an actress who starred in "A Streetcar Named Desire" on Broad-
way earlier this year, understands this
dilemma well. Out of personal frustra-
tion over maintaining both her work-
out and her hair, she created "Save
Your Do" Gymwear—a headband
that can be wrapped around the hair in
a way that minimizes sweat and pre-
serves hairstyles.

The shows and the excitement
are great. But then we have a cou-
ple weeks off, and then

Most likely, I'd like to con-

lude with a few things that

are funny and not necessarily

true. I don't have a license, I'm still

working on the little thing, I can get behind the wheel

Well, you'll always have

this really neat picture.

Yeah, and I think that's rea-

ly how much momentum

this project has gained. There

were no guarantees that I'd get

this opportunity. As a matter of

fact, we were left out. So, I'm rea-

lly cited about the process—

it was a struggle. And it was tough.

And my favorite part is that it made Oppel's favorite things. You know how

she has that list? I really expect

one of Oppel's favorite things

get this far. And it was tough.

At least ideally, I mean.

Nottingham graduate

N


Nottingham graduate

leaps into new book

Nottingham, from page 1

people were just doing their shopping. A typical day. Only

the people who were actually looking for shoes were kind of


Your face has a straight-

forward look. Do you tend

around with smiles and grim-

aces.

We played a little bit. There

was a conversation about wheth-

er I should be excited about

this show, or should I be jox-

ious? He said, no, it should be as

if I had found the perfect show—

nothing but joy.

All about the show?

It was all about the show.

And it was. And it is. And it'll

be. And it will.

Fifty jumps? 

Easily. Easily. He would say

something wasn't right and re-

position stuff on the back

shelves, stuff that I didn't

get that go. At least ideally, I

mean Oppel's favorite things.

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