

USC Ballerina Lives Out

Every Little

Go to any dance studio across the United States and take witness of the common childhood dream of becoming a ballerina as millions of little girls tiptoe around in fluffy pink tutus and replica tiaras. It's hard to imagine any of these young girls ever fulfilling such a lofty dream, but one former Upper St. Clair resident is doing just that on the big stage in New York City.

Emily Kikta is only 19 years old, but she is a professional ballerina for the New York City Ballet. Emily grew up in Upper St. Clair and attended Upper St. Clair High School for her freshman year before deciding to make her move to New York. Emily's journey through ballet started long before her jump to New York though, as she started dancing when she was only two years old. She took dance classes at The Thomas Studio of Performing Arts where her mother, Patti, taught, and still teaches ballet to this day. At first, she participated in all forms of dance, enjoying jazz, tap, ballet, gymnastics, and even hip-hop.

The young ballerina didn't discriminate when it came to the types of dance that she

enjoyed as a youngster, but she knew at a very young age that she wanted to try to dance professionally someday. Once Emily was in high school, she split her day into halves. In the morning, Emily attended Upper St. Clair to take academic classes, and then left at noon to take ballet at the Ballet Academy in Pittsburgh. She also continued her dance studies at The Thomas Studio of Performing Arts as well. After her freshman year at USC, Emily decided to make the move to New York City permanently. She had already spent two previous summers there attending the School of American Ballet's summer program, and at the age of 15, she moved into the school's dormitory and prepared to finish out high school in New York.

Emily's high school experience may seem alien to most readers, but it was all part of a process and opportunity that led her to where she is now. "We all went to high school in the morning a few blocks away from where we lived, took ballet classes during the day, and then did homework in the evenings," Emily said. After two years of this type of program, Emily graduated from the Professional Children's School, which is a private



BY LEIGH LYONS

Girl's Dream

high school for young artists and professionals in New York. After two years at the school, Emily was then able to concentrate completely on her dance. She made the transition from student to professional look easy.

"During the fall of my third year at the school, I was asked to join the New York City Ballet along with another friend of mine," Emily recounts. The School of American Ballet trains the dancers in her company, but there is never a guarantee that someone will be accepted into the company. While Emily was in her third year, the ballet master of the company, Peter Martins, started teaching and watching her class. In October of 2010 Mr. Martins asked Emily to become an apprentice with the company and thus her journey continued on.

Now at the ripe old age of 19, Emily is a professional ballerina on the world's brightest stage. Her day is never the same, ranging from all day rehearsals, to taking classes with her company, to actual performances. In January of 2012, Emily was performing two Balanchine ballets entitled "Who Cares?" and "Union Jack," and she was also working in a collaborative ballet by Peter Martins and Paul McCartney, called "Ocean's Kingdom." Whatever the week, whatever the performance, Emily's days as a professional ballerina are action packed doing something that she truly loves and enjoys.

She has also embraced the city life of being in New York City. "I just love New York," Emily boasts. "As crazy and as busy as New York is, I love that there is always something to do." While she has already accomplished such a lofty goal at such a young age that most others cannot

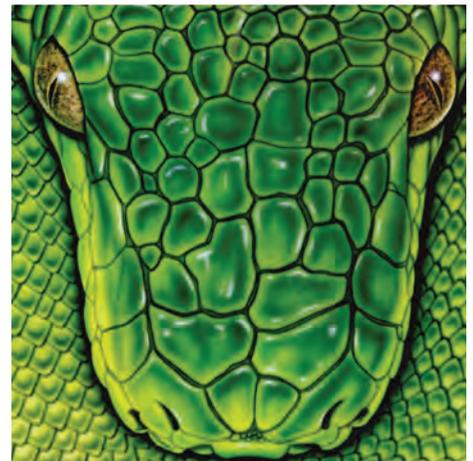
"I'm still rather new to the company so I hope to have a successful future here where I have a great deal of opportunities to dance all sorts of ballets."



~EMILY KIKTA

even fathom, Emily shies away when asked about her future. "I'm still rather new to the company so I hope to have a successful future here where I have a great deal of opportunities to dance all sorts of ballets," she said. While she is having that opportunity to perform a variety of ballets right now, Emily is also attending Fordham University part time to garner some college credit in order to prepare for her future after ballet. She's not quite sure what type of career she wants to have after she has hung up her ballet shoes, but she is smart enough to prepare, even though she has a lot of time before that day actually comes.

For now, Emily is content on living out her childhood dream of being a professional ballerina. All of her hard work and sacrifice has paid off thus far, and the opportunities that ballet has presented her are not lost on the talented young lady. The talented young lady who started off in a children's ballet class at a local dance studio complete with fluffy, pink tutus and flashy tiaras.



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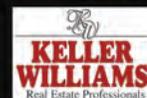


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