

Health + Wellness

Dancing her dream role

"The Nutcracker" inspired Emily Short to start ballet as a child; now, she's just finished dancing her dream role as Clara for the third season. She can't imagine being fit without dance.

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Emily Short, student at Ballet Royale Minnesota

Tom Wallace, Star Tribune

FROM SUGAR PLUM FAIRY TO CLARA: The reason I wanted to be involved in ballet was because I wanted to be in "The Nutcracker." So I started 11 years ago, and I've played every role from an angel to Clara. Every year, I told my parents I was going to be Clara one year. And then one year it happened. I was ecstatic. At the very last show we did this year, I tried to keep myself under control for the bow, but Clara always comes out last and everyone gave me a standing ovation and I just lost it.

RUBY SLIPPERS, EN POINTE: In May we're doing "The Wizard of Oz," and I'm Dorothy. It's kind of the same as Clara: A lot of acting is involved in the roles, but also a lot of work and dance.

A WAY OF LIFE: I dance every day Monday through Saturday for at least three or four hours. We have basic ballet class and then pointe or rehearsal. There's no time for other exercise. I have to be really diligent and do my homework right away and very precisely so I don't have to go back.

THE CHALLENGES: Every once in a while we have a day that we dedicate to conditioning and stretching and little workouts to keep our body in shape and not be sore. This last "Nutcracker" season, we had a professional massage twice. That was really helpful to relax muscles, and we do a lot of stretching on our own.

I have sprained both ankles -- I jumped and landed wrong -- and I've had hip injuries from working really hard. But really focusing on technique helps you stay away from injuries.

GIVING IT ALL, AND THEN SOME: Physically some days it feels like such good exercise. Plus, if you really have a passion for something, it really feels amazing. But some days you're just really sore and forced to work 110 percent ... but it's good for you. Especially during performance time and rehearsals, I try to eat well and get enough vitamins and proteins. Otherwise it's really hard to keep up the stamina for rehearsals and performances. I try to eat something like pasta and chicken that will stay with me and last through the show so I'm not standing onstage with a growling stomach.

SECOND ACT: Since I've been in high school, I've never gone more than a couple of weeks without dancing. I can't really imagine my life without dance, but I think it would be really hard for me to stay in shape. I've been looking at companies and thinking of auditioning places for next year, and I want to take some college classes, as well. I want to always keep dancing as some part of my life.

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EMILY SHORT, BALLET ROYALE MINNESOTA PRE-PROFESSIONAL LEVEL STUDENT

Ballet Royale is located off I-35 on the Burnsville-Lakeville border. The company she dances with for professional productions (The Nutcracker, Wizard of Oz, etc.) is Twin Cities Ballet of Minnesota, the Resident Dance Company of the Burnsville Performing Arts Center (just off I-35W & Hwy 13). "Wizard of Oz-The Ballet" is an all-new original full length production premiering May 18, 2011 at Burnsville Performing Arts Center. This production is presented by Twin Cities Ballet of Minnesota in collaboration with Ballet Royale Minnesota and Envision Academy of the Arts.