

TEENS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Samantha Stillwell Dancing Her Way to NYC

By Sophie Peikin,
Sidwell Friends Class of 2019

Lakelands resident Samantha Stillwell is a sophomore at Quince Orchard High School and a ballerina. She began dancing at age six and currently trains and dances with the Metropolitan Ballet Theatre and Academy (MBT). She has a bright future ahead of her in dance.

Samantha recently competed in the Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP), the world's largest international student ballet competition and scholarship program. The YAGP conducts yearly regional competitions both in the United States and around the world. At these regional competitions, finalists are judged on a variety of specific criteria, such as technique and artistry. The top-scoring three finalists are invited to attend the final competition. This season the first YAGP competition was held in July 2018 in Brazil and the final competition was held in March 2019 in Indianapolis. Samantha competed in the regional competition in Pittsburgh in January and took third place in the Classical Dance Category, which earned her a spot in the finals. She is ecstatic to compete in the week-long competition which will take place in New York City in April.

Samantha also placed in the top 12 with her contemporary solo during the regional competition. The YAGP is an internationally acclaimed dance network with a mission to support and develop world-class dancers, ages 9-19, of all economic, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds. Over the past 20 years, they have given \$4,000,000 in scholarships to leading dance schools.

Her commitment to ballet includes attending classes and rehearsals six days a week. Each class runs approximately two hours long, and rehearsals can range from one to five hours. In order to prepare for the YAGP competition, Samantha rehearsed twice a week, from August to January, with her instructor. Elizabeth Catlett is Samantha's Artistic Director. She said, "Samantha is an extremely talented dancer. She has amazing flexibility in her legs, hips, feet and back that allow her to create stunning and technically-correct lines and shapes in her dancing. She is also naturally graceful and elegant and is a strong performer on stage."

Having been passionate about ballet from a young age, Samantha enjoys the life-long friendships she has formed with her fellow dancers. She has participated in many of MBT's productions of *The Nutcracker*, dancing in roles ranging from Gum Drop to Clara. Although her primary dance training has been in classical ballet she also enjoys modern dance and jazz as well.

Samantha's mom Erin said, "When Samantha started dancing as a small child we never dreamed that she would continue to this extent with such determination. She is her own driving force when it comes to excelling in the art of dance and we support her 100 percent in pursuing her dreams to one day



join a professional ballet company." She added that MBT has been the life force that fuels Samantha's passion for dance. "We are grateful that she has had the opportunity to receive such exceptional training from the artistic staff at MBT." Samantha says that she is very grateful to be a member of the MPT community. "I'm thankful to receive wonderful training from my talented instructors." She added that she enjoys ballet for the challenges it presents and the incredible performing opportunities.

Samantha will be spending her spring break attending the finals in New York City. Catlett said, "This was MBT's third year competing in YAGP. In these three years I have had students place in the top 12 for classical and contemporary, but this is the first year I have had a student go to the finals in NYC."

When she isn't dancing, Samantha enjoys spending time with her family, friends, and her dog. She has lived in the Lakelands all of her life with her parents David and Erin, and her brother Ryan who is a 7th grader at LPMS. When she isn't on stage, you can find her cooking and travelling.