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JUST DANCE!

Ginny Gan

The life of ballet dancers is not as 'light' as it seem as they prouette onstage - a lot of hard work goes behind the scenes. The strenuous rehearsals aside, there's painful feet to endure after dancing tip-toed for hours on pointe shoes. "I'm not too sure about other dancers but mine became swollen and bruised," says full-time Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT) ballerina Ginny Gan, 22.

Despite her age, Ginny has accumulated a wealth of experience training locally and overseas. "I was really glad the Singapore Ballet Academy (SBA) accepted me back then or else I wouldn't have come this far at this age in the dance industry," she reminisces. She'd been training with SBA for 5 years since 1999 before she received the NAC bursary to advance her training with New Zealand School of Dance (NZSD) from which she graduated in 2007.

MAKING WAVES DOWN UNDER

She was among the two students selected by NZSD to attend an exchange program with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School. She was also the first-prize winner in the modern group category of the Asia-Pacific Dance Competition and in the modern solo category of the Perth Theatrical Festival Dance Competition. Over the years, she'd performed in several big productions with SDT including *Siberian Lake*, *Giselle in the Park* and *Continuu*, to name a few.

Weekdays become busy for Ginny when she's involved in a production. If the dance piece is a story ballet, rehearsing starts two to three months before performance. For contemporary and neo-classical pieces, rehearsing would be about two months. A typical training day starts from 10am to 5.30pm, which sometimes can be so tiring and intense that the dancers' appetites are affected. "Of course, we try to eat but not as much as usual,"

she clarifies. But on regular days she'd come home everyday to her big tub of Ben and Jerry chocolate ice cream.

Under the pressure to look graceful on the stage, many ballet dancers struggle with their body images. Famous ballerina Gelsey Kirkland was also known to have suffered from eating disorders.

"I would say, eat what you want to eat. Do not deprive yourself of the things you crave for. The best way is to eat in moderation. Control the amounts but at least you satisfy your cravings!" If there's one thing that worries her, it has to be dancing itself.

There was a point in Ginny's life that she almost gave up ballet. "There were days where I kept practising and was still unsatisfied because there were many others who were better. Many times, I went home after school and cried in my room. I wondered if I had made the right choice," she recalls her days at NSZD. "But when a new day starts, I always tell myself that I'm going to be better today."

IS THE PASTURE ALWAYS GREENER ELSEWHERE?

"The biggest difference between local and overseas training is the amount of training, knowledge and experience. I would say that the teachers at SBA were really encouraging towards the students, although it is not a full time dance school. My teachers at New Zealand School of Dance were very encouraging as well but they tried not to praise us too much, and that in turn made us work harder.

"At SBA, I only had ballet classes and hardly any pointe work. However, at NZSD, we had ballet, pointe class, coaching class, contemporary class, ballet repertoire, pas de deux (dance for two), body conditioning, pilates, stretching, improvisation and theory classes such as dance history, music, anatomy and dietary," says Ginny. ♦