

DAILY BREEZE

Dancer from Palos Verdes Ballet signs with Chicago ballet company



Olivia Tang-Misfad Photo by Uta Graf-Apostol

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POSTED: 07/03/16, 2:44 PM PDT | UPDATED: 3 WEEKS, 4 DAYS AGO

All it took was one performance of ‘The Nutcracker,’ and, at 6 years old, Olivia Tang-Mifsud knew she’d maker her career in ballet.

A week after her mother took her to see that performance, Tang-Mifsud showed up at a class with the Palos Verdes Ballet, and 13 years later, after years dancing on the Peninsula and a move to Northern California to perform with the San Francisco Ballet School, the 19-year-old dancer is making another leap, this time to Chicago to join the Joffrey Ballet.

During her time with the Palos Verdes Ballet, she performed in a variety of roles, something Tang-Mifsud said has been a boon during her dancing tenure.

“I guess, especially now, looking back at all the opportunities I’ve been given since I was little, I’m really grateful,” she said.

In addition to her dance training, she took extra classes at Palos Verdes Peninsula High School after her regular courses and, once she got home, squeezed in more classes online. The extra work allowed her to graduate in 2014 after just three years and move straight into her dancing career with the San Francisco Ballet school.

After two years in San Francisco, she applied to dance with several other companies, she said. She flew to Tulsa to perform for a place in the ballet company there, and danced again and again for companies passing through San Francisco.

Finally, with her application to Chicago she made headway with the help of the director at the San Francisco Ballet school. The director told her she would be a good fit with the Joffrey Ballet, she said.

“Every company has their own look or type of dancer, so some companies will have really, really tall girls, where some companies have maybe a mix,” she said.

Even with the help from her director, the process of signing with Joffrey was competitive.

“It’s really difficult just because there’s so many girls. It was hard but you just have to focus on yourself,” she said. “Everything that I’ve learned (at the Palos Verdes Ballet), as well as (the San Francisco Ballet School) I feel really prepared me.”

Now, with her leap to Chicago, she said she’s ready to start working on a new repertoire of performances she wouldn’t otherwise get the chance to tackle. Joffrey is known for including both contemporary dances and classical ballet into its repertoire, something that attracted her to the company, Tang-Mifsud said.

It wasn’t until after she’d made the decision to join the Joffrey Ballet that she visited Chicago for the first time, she said. During her first trip she found her apartment, just two train stops away from the company’s center.

Even as she moves on to dance with one of the country’s best companies, Tang-Mifsud attributed much of her current success to the training she received during her time with the Palos Verdes Ballet.

“I think one of the most important and rare qualities for a dancer is the ability to convey a detailed interpretation of a role that he or she is dancing and I think it’s hard to find that kind of training at a lot of schools,” she said. “That’s something that (the Palos Verdes) ballet has really helped me with.”