



SPECIAL INTEREST STORY

Contact: Tracey Halama  
773-251-7145  
iydt@ballroomanddance.com

***BRINKMANN FAMILY HOLIDAY TRADITIONS:  
OVER 30 YEARS OF DANCING "THE NUTCRACKER"***

---

---

When Alyce Keaggy (Brinkmann) was a 5 year old ballet student learning the difference between first and fifth position and she first heard the chords of Tchaikovsky's "Waltz of the Snowflakes," she knew that her dream was to dance the lead of "The Nutcracker" when she grew up. Not only did she achieve her goal, having danced "Clara / Marie" over 17 times, including 13 times with The Milwaukee Ballet, but this year marks three decades of dancing or directing this full length holiday classic ballet. This year, however, is the most significant Nutcracker production for Ms. Keaggy-Brinkmann to date. Her 13-year old daughter, Marlena Brinkmann, will be dancing that dreamy role of "Marie" in the Illinois Youth Dance Theatre's production of "The Nutcracker."

According to Ms. Keaggy-Brinkmann, "Tchaikovsky is pure genius and there is something beautiful, wholesome and truly inspiring about the story of a young girl who dreams that her beloved toy turns into a Prince and takes her on a magical adventure." Marlena, who is a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at Nippersink Middle School in Richmond, danced her first Nutcracker when she was 3 years old playing the role of "Baby Mouse" and a cherub. Ten productions later, she has danced nearly every role, including Sprinkle Corps, Spanish Corps, Emma, Guardian Angel, Gingerbread Corps, Marzipan Corps and Russian Demi until now when she will be dancing as Marie and will be on stage nearly the entire 2 hour plus production. "She has grown from a precious little girl who had a short attention span, into this very strong, independent, lovely dancer. As her teacher, I am impressed by her dedication - she just pours herself into her craft. As her mother, I am in awe of this beautiful young lady and I couldn't be more proud." Says Keaggy-Brinkmann.

Marlena's father, Steve, cannot remember a time when "The Nutcracker" was not part of their holiday traditions, having met Alyce when she was 18, the first year she danced "Clara" for The Milwaukee Ballet. It is part of the Brinkmann identity. In fact, even their 16 year old son, Luke, who plays football for Richmond High spent several years also dancing in the holiday production as a Marie's brother and a soldier. Luke tries to not bring too much attention to that fact with his football buddies, but his mother is quick to remind him that Herschel Walker and Walter Payton both included ballet as part of their conditioning.

Marlena, who just turned 13, dances 35 hours a week to prepare for “The Nutcracker” lead role. When asked about what this role means to her, she said, “It is a privilege to dance Marie, it means so much to me knowing how special this production is to our whole family and it also means that I have improved a lot over the years.” The vast majority of young dancers don’t have to live up to the legacy of a professional ballerina mother, yet Marlena seems to take it in stride. “My mom has so much experience and I have so much yet to learn if I want to dance professionally someday. Her goal is to dance in a professional company, ideally The American Ballet in New York City. On being Ms. Keaggy-Brinkmann’s daughter Marlena said, “I’m lucky that I can have a free private (lesson) anytime on a Sunday, the only downside is that sometimes I have to clean up after the other dancers in the studio.”

Much like “Marie” in the “The Nutcracker”, the Brinkmann family embodies the idea of dreaming big. When you see the set, the costumes, and the high quality of this professional production, you know that this is beautiful tradition that has come to life every holiday season. Year after year, “The Nutcracker” sends inspirational message to young girls to work hard, set high goals and magical adventures are, in fact, possible.

The full length ballet features pre-professional junior and senior company members from the Illinois Youth Dance Theatre, including Marlena and her co-star, 16 year old Miquella Young from Lake Zurich. Both girls will be dancing “Marie” and train at the Center for Ballroom and Dance in Deer Park under the direction of Alyce Keaggy-Brinkmann, Artistic Director. “The Nutcracker” features professional guest artists, Ricardo Santos of The Joffery Ballet, Liam Fitzpatrick of The Chicago Academy of the Performing Arts and Kristin Kaye, a former World Champion Rhythmic Gymnast.

“The Nutcracker” will be performed Friday, December 21<sup>st</sup> at 7:00PM, Saturday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> at 1:00 and 5:00PM and Sunday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> at 3:00PM at the Lake Zurich Performing Arts Center at 300 Church Street in Lake Zurich, IL 60047. Tickets range from \$10 to \$25 and can be purchased beginning October 8th by visiting <http://www.ballroomanddance.com/iydt-productions.html>

Illinois Youth Dance Theatre was founded in 1999 by Alyce Keaggy-Brinkmann, and operates as a not-for-profit organization committed to classic and contemporary ballet repertoire. IYDT promotes community outreach and cultivates interest and education in performing arts, as well as enriching the personal best in each dancer. Illinois Youth Dance Theatre is funded by members and private donations. All donations are tax deductible via 501(c) (3).

###