



teen ink

By teens, for teens

January 2024

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the
**PERFORMING
ARTS!**

A MEMORABLE FIRST PERFORMANCE



ARTICLE BY FELICE CIPUTRA,
JAKARTA, INDONESIA

I stood at the entrance and looked up at the tall, imposing structure of the grand theater. After staring at it every day for almost two years, I finally had a chance to perform there. I walked in, trying to concentrate on the piece I would be playing, but my mind fled every now and then, unable to keep focus on anything for long.

I passed grand hallways, climbed up long, winding staircases, and finally arrived at the main auditorium. For years, I had dreamed of gazing up at the glass-domed ceiling, waltzing through the hallways, and playing the elaborate piano at the gold-gilded stage — and here I was, at last.

My insides were twisting, my heart was drumming, and my mind was frightened blank. It screamed, *turn away and leave!* This couldn't possibly end well. My palms were clammy and goosebumps rose along my skin, but I kept walking, trying to ignore the pooling sense of dread in my gut. It only worsened when I saw how the audience filled the seats to the brim. The glaring spotlight did not help either — I was the center of everyone's attention like a mannequin at the window display of a boutique, and the audience was hidden in the darkness. I felt incredibly exposed as if my heart was put out for everyone to observe. My feet hurried over to reach the piano in its grandiose. I sat rigidly on its ebony chair, thankful for the instrument's slight cover from the audience's peering eyes.

Calming my racing heart, I delicately rested my fingers on the smooth ivory keys. All other thoughts disappeared as I marveled at its beauty. Where I had been so anxious just moments before, I now felt a steady calmness flowing through me. A sense of peace overtook my being. All I have to do is focus.

The first keys were played with hesitant fingers, but then the crowd and the world soon faded from my vision, and I was alone. I

PHOTO BY XU ZHAO,
SHANGHAI, CHINA

greeted the keys like an old friend, and it led me through the maze of darkness. The haze of fear that dawned on my mind had been cleared. I smiled as a newfound focus was instilled in me.

The melody swept throughout the theater, echoing against its beautiful ornate walls. My fingers ran all on their own accord, playing the piece I had composed with love and practiced almost every single day for months. Months and months of training would not betray me. White keys and black keys, sharps and flats, I played them all. Each chord sent out a spectrum of colors that deeply resonated with my being. The piece that had started out lightly had built into a roaring wave. It washed away any lingering feelings of doubt, uncovering the joy that was hidden underneath — the story of my heart's content.

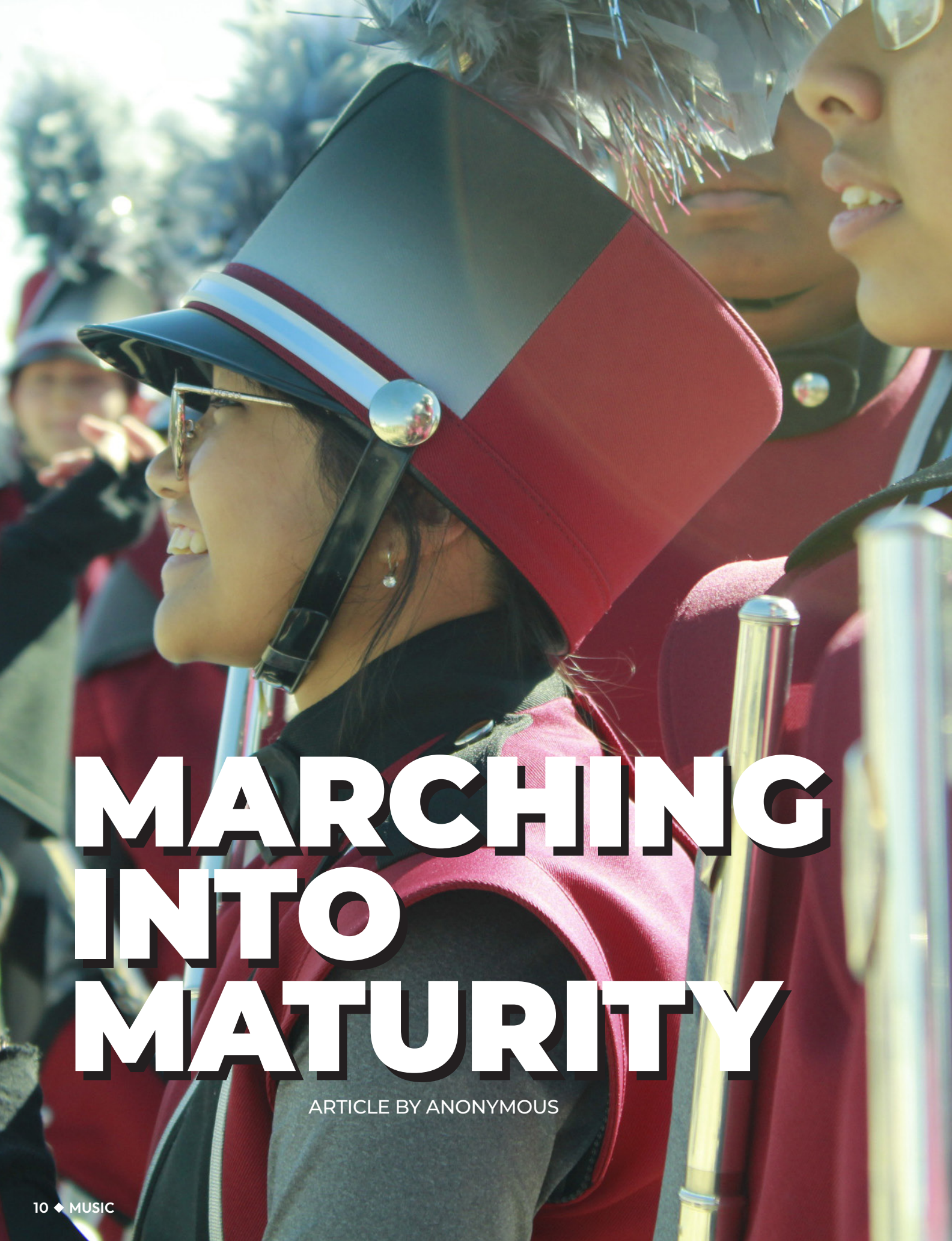
Before I knew it, the final key was pressed, and the last note reverberated across the now-silent auditorium, echoing like a reminder of a dream that had finally come to life. Slowly, the crowd reappeared in my peripheral vision, and I caught the motion of them standing to their feet. The air soon filled

with standing ovation, and I bowed, incredibly relieved at last.

As the applause died, I took a deep breath and looked around the theater. It was as beautiful as I had imagined it would be. The fear and anxiety I felt beforehand no longer resurfaced when I gazed at the audience; only elation remained. As I took my final bow and walked off the stage, I knew that this moment, this first performance at the theater, was something that I would never forget. It was a culmination of all my hard work, determination, and passion for music, a reminder that fear and doubt can always be conquered with these factors.

It was the beginning of a long journey, and there would be many more exhilarating moments to come. ♦

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THAT I WOULD NEVER FORGET**



MARCHING INTO MATURITY

ARTICLE BY ANONYMOUS

Sometimes, what the heart wants is not always what's best. Taking a step back and making a mature yet difficult decision can lead to happiness. If someone had asked me which college I wanted to attend in my sophomore year of high school, I would have said Ohio State University, yet somehow, I still ended up at ASU, just 30 miles from my hometown. I have always been a colossal band nerd. For the past five years, I have eaten, slept, breathed, and lived marching band. My experience in music embodies my path into adulthood and life-changing decisions.

My passion for band started in fourth grade when my older sister joined the middle school band. Her passion started after she sat in on a band practice when there wasn't a substitute for one of her classes, and the students needed somewhere to go. Later in the semester, the local high school hosted a middle school night, inviting middle school students to come and play with them in the stands at a football game, which my sister took part in. Being the little brother who couldn't be left home alone, I had to go as well. I remember walking into the stadium after the band with my mom, in complete awe of them. I can still imagine the tubas swinging in time to the drum cadence and the way the lone silver

MY EXPERIENCE IN MUSIC EMBODIES MY PATH INTO ADULTHOOD AND LIFE-CHANGING DECISIONS

tuba among four gold ones gleamed in the stadium lights. I don't know what captivated me, but I'm glad it did. I decided on the spot that I would be in band so I could be like them.

I began concert band in middle school. My playing embodied my young ambitions. At the time, my instrument, the trumpet, reflected my personality — loud, extroverted, flashy. I wanted attention and worked hard to get it. If that meant

I'm not bad at the tuba: I was one of only four freshmen in the competitive symphonic wind ensemble. I devoted all my free time to the instrument. I had rescued an old, decrepit tuba from a friend's trash — I saw its potential.

READY, SET, MARCH

PHOTO BY
MIKAELA ALDECO,
SHERMAN, TX



putting in hours a day on the trumpet to catch the eye of my band director or outlandishly taking shots of pickle juice out of bikini-shaped shot glasses, I would do it. Still a child in many ways, I had lots of growing to do before I could move on to the next phase of life. As the end of middle school approached, the need to grow up became more apparent. I was going to high school, a place where I would spend my last years of childhood, and I needed to be ready for whatever came after.

I started the hellish experience that is high school band camp in the deadly heat of an Arizona summer. The tuba was excruciating to pick up and move, and every day was harder than the last. I was hot and exhausted for weeks. Everything hurt. Despite thinking I was going to drop dead at any moment, I survived and started the school year.

During concert season, I worked on my playing skills and found out that

Just when I got it working again, I took it apart to give to a family friend who paints low-rider cars for a living; he said he would give it a custom paint job for me. With every breath, I craved the tuba. I started practicing more — enough that I was selected to be in the tuba section during my junior year and qualified for the Juniper Regional Band, the most difficult to get into in the state. Tuba was no longer just a hobby; it was part of my identity.

This realization was a turning point. I tried even harder and got further. I started growing up. I became more responsible by taking on more projects in school and becoming a section leader in my band, in addition to working a part-time job. Other people took me seriously, too. My parents stopped treating me like a child and saw me as the adult I quickly became. I attribute this self-growth to pushing myself in music. More importantly, I took myself seriously. I realized that I had potential, and it would mean wasting a chance at a meaningful

My Dream Career: **ACTING**

BY ELLIE BOYCE, NASHOTAH, WI

Watching from the crowd, six-year-old me gripped the seat in front of me. Peeking over, eyes sparkling, I knew I found something special. Ever since I was a kid, I have been completely infatuated with acting. Seeing one person alone leave a stillness, a deafening quiet that presses against the audience's chest, or just acting out something so real, so deeply felt, you can affect those emotionally around you always fascinated me. Quickly, I knew I wanted to get involved as soon as possible... Not only did seeing shows spark the flame, but I was also often told, even as a child, that I should try it.

To get involved, my mom began to put me in acting academies like

First Stage, where I immediately fell in love with it. The people were so fun to work with, comfortable, and encouraging. The experience taught me how to never let fear, discomfort, or embarrassment prevent me from doing what I love. Taking risks, being a leader, and never doubting yourself are just a few of the first lessons I embraced while learning. Everything about it was so fun and perfect; my heart had settled.

Not long after, I auditioned for school shows, I got involved in forensics (speech, debate, and group/solo acting) and community and professional theater. I never got sick of it all. Not only did I love it, but after third, second, and first place trophies at state for forensics each year, I felt proud that acting was not only my passion but a talent, too.

Most interests of mine have only stuck around for a small amount of time before I find something more exciting or lose that interest I had at first. But with acting, each and every time I step on stage with others who have the same smile and spark in their eyes, I continue to get that rush that no other interest has ever come close to giving me. But one of my favorite parts of theater is the people. Not only do they feed into that passion, but they are a community of

people who spend so much time with each other and are forced to be vulnerable. Your castmates become your closest friends, creating a community that couldn't be closer or more accepting of each other.

Over these 10 years, I have seen Broadway shows, modeled, participated in student films and acting camps, performed in ensembles or as leads in community and professional theater, and even wrote my college essay about theater. From the beginning, I have consistently reached for every opportunity to perform, and I want to continue to do what I love in any possible way I can.

While I'm not pursuing acting as a career, I want to try and continue it as a hobby. I fear that if I depend on theater to make money and make it a career instead, I will lose the love and drive I have. Pursuing it in my free time will allow me to perform without that pressure and only have to care about my passion for it. So, ultimately, I plan on continuing my passion by minoring in Theater in college and getting involved in related clubs, like drama club. Acting has given me so much, It has become a piece of me that I never want to let go of. I am incredibly excited to see where the next chapters after high school take me, and hopefully, one day, it becomes more than just a dream. ♦



PHOTO BY LIZ STRUT,
BUFFALO, NY



Good for **You**

Blackout.

This is it. Months of preparation and excitement leading up to these scarce times. The moment is here.

The lights suddenly blind me at every angle as everyone's eyes find me.

What if I'm not ready? What if I mess up? What if it doesn't live up to my fantasies?

The music commences and rushes through my veins. The tune eases my body to allow the knots in my stomach to unravel and the lump in my throat to dissipate.

Act big. Belt it out. I try to remind myself. However, my muscle memory has taken over, and my erratic overthinking has no chance to interfere.

I love this. I love everything about this. The burning of the lights, the gentle heat radiation off my body, my energy at its maximum, the firm wooden stage supporting my every decision, the encouragement from the audience, but mostly the tenderness of knowing that my parents are somewhere in this sea of people tearing up from pride of their not-so-little, little girl.

Every stressful thought. Every exhausting day. Every single ounce of effort... it's been worth it. ♦

ARTICLE BY MARGARET WALLOCH,
HARTLAND, WI

The Performing Arts

Artwork & Photography Contest

WINNER ANNOUNCED ON PAGE 32

HONORABLE MENTIONS

1. "DANCING 2" BY ANONYMOUS
2. "BEHIND THE CURTAIN" BY CLAIRE DOH, MCLEAN, VA
3. "BUCHAECHUM: A TRADITIONAL KOREAN FAN DANCE" BY CAITLYN KIM, CERRITOS, CA



the language of ballet

ARTICLE BY KAYLA SONG, WOODBRIDGE, CT

Since I was three years old, ballet has played a huge role in my life. Ballet taught me the importance of emotional expression. While dancing, I can convey different emotions through physical motions and connect with the audience.

Sometimes, emotions are very difficult to express, especially with words. Because of this, I have learned how to express emotions through ballet, which allows me to interpret the same choreography differently, depending on my feelings. When I dance, I am able to tell a story driven by my emotions and physically embody the complex thoughts that live in my head. Through ballet, I've learned that your body will always give away what you feel inside through how you move. When I am happy, my movements are sharp and bright; when I am sad, my movements are slower and low-spirited. My performance suffers when I am anxious or upset because my movements lack emotion.

Performing shows like "The Nutcracker," I have learned the importance of connecting with the audience by embodying these emotions. Music plays a significant role in this process by directly influencing atmospheric tones and, therefore, our (the dancer's) emotions. For example, when the music is more upbeat, I am inclined to make happier movements. When it is legato, or smoothly connected, my movements follow suit — smoothing, connecting in tandem with this quality of music. This allows me to really get into character and capture the attention of the audience. Since the emotions are genuinely felt due to the

musical influence, my performance feels more authentic, and the audience can sense this. Like words, physical movements become a way of communicating. It allows the audience to better understand the characters we are portraying and to empathize with them. My ballet teacher always says, "With expression

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comes connection," and reminds me of the importance of real expression as a means of connecting with my audience.

Through ballet, I have learned a lot about what it means to really perform. Although it seems as though the act of performing can be very contrived, the best performers usually express their genuine emotions and wholeheartedly become their respective characters. Over the years, I've learned that ballet is more than just mastering the delicate technical movements; it is essential that your movements convey emotion so that your audience can interpret your story, too. ♦



"THE PRINCE"
ARTWORK BY ZHIYU ZHENG,
SUZHOU, CHINA

ARTICLE BY ANONYMOUS

THE DANCER'S PUZZLE

When you think of a puzzle, you see many types, sizes, and amounts of pieces needed to be fully complete. When a piece is missing, there is a noticeable difference, which must be adjusted to be complete. The more pieces you have to your puzzle, the more impressive the outcome will be to a person's eye. In dance, everyone is a piece of the puzzle, including dancers, coaches, family, and spectators. When a piece is missing, you have to restart and adjust the way you put it together to make it look like no mistake happened and complete it the way it should be.

June 13th through 19th, 2022, was one of the most stressful weeks there was in a dancer's life. Nationals are the ultimate competition to show off your skills and technique to become champions. That year, they selected my studio as one of the best in Minnesota, which became a lot of stress and nerves with all eyes on us. The training and build-up that leads to competition days complete that ultimate puzzle, as each practice day adds up to see the final product, putting it together and showing the puzzle fully completed. The first day of competition was always known as the day for solos, duos, and trios. Senior elite members warmed up for the first round of solos on stage. Soon after, we hear one of our teammates screaming for help, running backstage with the lingering hairspray smell rushing through our bodies; we see her lying on the ground.

"Help, I need ice... I stepped wrong while warming up and completely twisted my ankle."

She was sitting there distraught, already knowing that she would be unable to do her solo and our group numbers and production. I watched her just sit there in pain, not knowing what to say, as nothing could help or relieve the pain and sadness she was going through. It is one of the worst things that could happen at a

dance competition. Having this injury affected not only her, but the team and the entire week.

"Tomorrow, everyone needs to be here extra early to re-block all dances for the rest of the week."

"I'm sorry, you guys, for this. This was not the week for this to happen."

We all sit and talk to her, explaining how there is no need to be sorry as there is nothing she can do, nor was she expecting this to happen. The sight of the rest of the team and studio surrounding her to sit and help her calm down was the best thing at that point.

The next day, walking into the event center, all we could hear was the music and the thoughts in our head, thinking, what will we do? We started the morning by re-blocking all of our dances one hour before going on stage. While warming up and re-blocking, we see our teammate walk in with a boot on her foot. Our hearts dropped into our stomachs. Now, for sure, knowing that she would not be competing for the rest of the week and that a critical piece of the puzzle was missing.

"Girls, we can not let this impact the rest of our week. Yes, it is sad to see, but we need to push through now more than ever and show why we are one of the best teams."

The puzzle is not fully complete or correct, as a puzzle piece is missing. Solving how to put the piece back in correctly is finding the right moves and formations to fix what is lost and recognizing that each team member must adjust to figuring out how to take that missing piece out and adjust without her.

Walking on stage for our first group dance, we all looked at each other, took a deep breath, and took the stage. We could hear our teammate screaming and cheering for us in the crowd as she sat in the front

row, giving us the happiest smile, considering the circumstances.

Walking off that stage with a sigh of relief and a smile on our faces was all we could do as we worked through something difficult and made the best of it.

"Yes, although we were all affected by this situation, we went out there and killed it for the circumstance given."

As awards were right around the corner, we had a feeling that people would notice our missing piece. But walking onto the stage and seeing her sitting and waiting for us was like our puzzle was complete in some aspects, and the team was fully together.

A dancer will always remember the feeling of the marble floor as they sit on the stage for awards. The bright lights hit our faces, sitting and waiting anxiously for results after being put through a lot in only the first couple of days of competing. It is the best feeling to take off the lipstick that has been on our lips all day, but so is kissing our coach's cheek after a win, even when missing a critical piece.

Some people who do not know much about dance or the structure of competition may not see this issue as such an enormous deal due to a lack of knowledge on how difficult fixing this could be. Some might think that even with someone injured and out of routine, the dance could still continue as it would have without the missing person. As anyone would think, some would relate it to another sports team, like football or basketball, where they find a replacement to fill that position. However, in dance, a set amount of people learn the dance, assuming they will perform and not have fill-ins. Seeing how others view dance is how I would view another sport without much knowledge by asking these types of questions and assuming what they can do for an easy fix. ♦

ARTWORK BY JUNO JIANG,
OAKVILLE, O.N., CANADA



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