

## South acrobat 'Tye-ing' talent to future career

Photo Credit: Photo by Atticus Ludwig

**NO CLOWNING AROUND:** Performing on silks suspended from the ceiling, sophomore Alison Tye practices one of the many routines she does as a circus performer.

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Gracefully twisting her limbs in order to secure her position on the large silk rope hanging from the ceiling, sophomore Alison Tye completes a series of tumbles to finish her performance. This practice is a typical routine for her, as she spends a large amount of her time perfecting this act for the circus in which she participates.



Tye works in the Actor's Gym in Evanston, where she practices as an acrobat and contortionist. The Actor's Gym hosts circuses, where a variety of activities are performed, such as silks, contortion, the trapeze and the tether board.

According to Tye, her favorite part of circus is silks, a type of aerial acrobatic where the performer does tricks while hanging from a special fabric. Tye also does contortion, which involves dramatic bending of the body, while trapeze is where a performer swings from a horizontal metal bar hung by ropes for support. Tether board is much like a seesaw, where one person jumps on one end and sends the person on the other end flying through the air.

At the Actor's Gym, Tye is part of the Teen Ensemble, an audition-based group which consists of 18 high school students. Tye feels this prepares her for a future as a circus performer.

"I learn a lot of new things everyday," Tye said. "It is kind of like a mini version of what I am going to have in the future."

Tye's practices are four days a week for four hours each when there is a show. Through the Actor's Gym, Tye gets to perform and do about 24 shows a year.

The foundation for Tye's participation in the Actor's Gym started at an early age. She started with ice skating at the Glenview Ice Rink but later joined rhythmic gymnastics. According to Tye, she got tired of this after five years.

"I didn't really want to compete anymore," Tye explained. "I wanted to do more performing. It was getting really stressful, too, [as] we [had] to drive to Minnesota every weekend."

Even though Tye quit, she is still glad she did rhythmic gymnastics. She believes it helped build the foundation for her future success in circus.

"It helped me pick up things a lot quicker because I had to learn routines," Tye said. "The flexibility I gained from rhythmic led me to do contortion, which also helps with a lot of the aerial stuff I do."

After Tye quit rhythmic gymnastics, she was introduced to the Actor's Gym through a friend who went to a camp hosted by it. After accompanying her friend there once, she never looked back.

According to Tye, the stigmas that surround the term 'circus' do not pertain to her company.

"People think I work with clowns, [but] our circus is more sophisticated," Tye said. "We do more professional and emotional pieces."

Last year, Tye competed with South's gymnastics team at the freshman level as well as at the junior varsity conference meet. Tye also participated in the 2011 Glenbrook musical, *Chicago*, where she performed on silks and the flying trapeze.

"I was really excited for the school to see me," Tye said. "I didn't audition because that was the only part I was in. Dr. Shellard knew that I was in the circus because I'm in juggling club and he thought it would be cool to incorporate me into the act."

Along with opportunities, however, she also faces many challenges, such as her fear of heights.

"I really have to push myself to get over [my fear] because I know if I want to keep performing when I get older, [it] can't be an issue," Tye said.

She says that a defining moment in her circus career was during her first show.

"The first time I did a three-high, which is one person standing on the ground, a second person standing on their shoulders, and a third person on the top, which was me, it helped me get over my fear of heights because the only way to get down was to jump," Tye said.

As for the future, Tye hopes to continue with the Actor's Gym and the gymnastics team at South. She hopes to make circus a part of her education by attending Illinois State University, which has a circus program and a flying trapeze. Tye also dreams to one day be in Cirque de Soleil, a famous entertainment company which specializes in circuses.

As for the near future, Tye will participate in a youth show in November and a professional show that runs from Feb. 11 to March 11.