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## Shout Out: Ayana Strutz, actor and dancer

By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER  
PIONEER PRESS | JUL 15, 2019 | 2:37 PM



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Ayana Strutz(Ayana Strutz)

Actor Ayana Strutz, 25, lives in Evanston and is a member of the dance ensemble and an understudy in the Goodman Theatre's production of "The Music Man," which is now running in Chicago. She took time to answer our questions via email.

**Q: How long have you lived in Evanston?**

A: I have been living in Evanston since August 2016. I am originally from Honolulu, Hawaii, and grew up there. I moved to Evanston after graduating Ohio State University with my husband, who is now pursuing a PhD at Northwestern University.

**Q: How did you get involved with acting? What draws you to the profession?**

A: My mom first enrolled me in dance classes when I was 4 years old. I was a very energetic child who would often dance with anything closest to me (i.e. a pile of clean laundry) and my mom saw how much I enjoyed expressing myself with movement. I continued dance training as I grew older, and was introduced to the world of musical theatre. I was fortunate enough to attend the Mid-Pacific Institute School of the Arts in Honolulu, Hawaii, which further nurtured my dream of performing professionally. I think that expression and reflection are a necessary part of life, and theatre allows me to do that. The profession also challenges me to stay strong to who I am as a person in the midst of all the auditions, rejections, and the nos. It has definitely helped me grow tougher skin, which has helped in all areas of life

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**Q: What roles do you play in “The Music Man?”  
What is your favorite part of the performance?**

A: I am part of the dance ensemble, and understudy Ethel Tofflemeir. My favorite part is performing the fun and quirky number “Marian the Librarian.” Denis Jones choreographed the show, and his energetic and creative numbers have been so fun to perform.

**Q: I see you also do circus arts. What is your specialty? What is the biggest challenge of circus arts?**

A: I started taking circus classes back in 2016 when I moved to Evanston, and fell in love with it. I attended a 9-month Professional Circus Training Program at the Actors Gymnasium in Evanston, and my main focuses were the aerial lyra (a metal hoop that hangs from the ceiling), tumbling, and contortion. The biggest challenges of circus for me personally, is staying patient, being disciplined, and not giving up. There are many times in training where I would often get frustrated about not being strong enough, not being flexible enough, etc. and beating myself up over my mistakes. With time and practice, everything feels a little better everyday, and I have to remind myself that I am a work in progress.

**Q: What is your favorite thing about summer in Evanston?**

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A: I love the warm weather! And the lake. It reminds me of the ocean I used to grow up with back home in Hawaii. It makes me feel a little more connected to home.

**Q: What is your favorite Evanston restaurant?**

A: The Lucky Platter is my guilty pleasure. I love their brunch food! And as for coffee, Brothers K Coffeehouse is number one!

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**Q: What book are you reading? What do you think of it so far?**

A: I am currently reading "Becoming" by Michelle Obama. I was drawn to learning more about her, especially since she is from Chicago. It is gripping, and I can't put it down.

## Q: What is your favorite movie? Why?

A: I'm a huge 1980s fan. The "Back To the Future" movies are my absolute favorite. Anything by John Hughes is also my favorite.

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Genevieve Bookwalter

CONTACT



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Genevieve Bookwalter covers the people and happenings in and around Evanston. She joined the Tribune in 2014 after working as a reporter and editor for news outlets in Northern California. In her spare time you usually can find her hiking a trail somewhere.

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