

# Star really living the role

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**I**n the musical "42nd Street," the central character, Peggy Sawyer, arrives in New York City from a small town in Pennsylvania.

Once in the city, Peggy lands a bit part as a chorus girl in a new Broadway musical.

When the lead actress breaks her ankle, Peggy gets her big break and finds herself in the show's lead role.

It's a success story that is so typically Hollywood (and the musical is based on a 1933 Busby Berkley film).

Although no actress broke her ankle to open the doors for her opportunity, Caitlin Ehlinger's arrival in the role of Peggy Sawyer in the national road tour of "42nd Street," none the less, has a similar Hollywood ring to it.

"42nd Street" arrives at the Palace Theater in Waterbury on Friday and Saturday.

Ehlinger, who turned 19 years old in September, said the opportunity to take on the lead role of a national tour is "pretty incredible. I can't believe it."

"When I got the job, I would wake up and walk into my mom's room and say, 'Is this real?'" said Ehlinger, who was calling from a stop on the road in Rapid City, S.D.

"It's been an amazing experience," she said.

Ehlinger, who lives in Texas, explained that during her senior year of high school, she decided she would take a year off to pursue her dream of being an actress. She said she decided to move to New York, audition for as many roles as she could, and take as much training as she could to improve her craft.

Then, after that year, Ehlinger said, she would return home and head off to college.

However, midway through her senior year, she received an email that auditions were being held in New York City for a road tour of the 1980 musical "42nd Street." And a familiar name was listed as a member of the creative team.

When she was younger, Ehlinger explained, she would travel with her dance school each summer to New York City. Once in the Big Apple, she would take master classes with famous choreographers and even take some private lessons.

Randy Skinner was one of the choreographers that she worked with.



CONTRIBUTED

Caitlin Ehlinger plays the role of Peggy Sawyer in the national road tour of '42nd Street,' at the Palace Theater in Waterbury this weekend.

And, as it turned out, Skinner was the choreographer for the upcoming road tour of "42nd Street."

Ehlinger saw that as a sign and she told her mother, "I have to get to this audition."

For Ehlinger, working with Skinner on a stage show had been an ambition going back to when she was in eighth grade.

Ehlinger said her mother was skeptical about auditioning.

"I told my mom, 'have to try,'" she

said. "I want him to see me dance."

Her mom relented and the pair of them traveled to New York City for the auditions.

Ehlinger and her mom weren't overly hopeful. She said they had bought airline tickets to return to Texas the next day, not expecting to get past the first round of auditions.

But something happened.

Ehlinger auditioned, and was given a callback. And she kept progressing through the assorted rounds of call-

## Small town gal won lead role in '42nd Street'

backs.

Eventually, she found herself in the role of Peggy.

The first night of previews of the show, Sept. 18, also happened to be her 19th birthday.

"It was the best day of my life," said Ehlinger.

The show takes place in the Great Depression. And to help get the actors in character, Ehlinger said the young cast was asked by the director to speak to their great grandparents or grandparents about that moment in history. And then each day of rehearsal, Ehlinger said, the cast would sit for a half-hour and listen to the stories the survivors of the Depression told their descendants.

"There were all of these incredible stories," she said. "It blew our minds how different it was then compared to now."

As a fan of musicals, Ehlinger said she likes this production of "42nd Street" because, "It sparkles. ... It's a big cast of 38. Everything about it is big."

"It also has lots of songs everyone knows," said Ehlinger, such as "We're in the Money," "Lullaby of Broadway" and "I Only Have Eyes For You." "I can't help it when I'm off stage, I'm bouncing around and singing the songs."

"You can't help but smile (when you see the show)," she said. "It's fun and it's happy. It just brings joy to people." And the cast, said Ehlinger, is "having so much fun."

"This is the quintessential backstage comedy musical," she said. "It's a musical classic."

### IF YOU GO

"42nd Street" arrives in at the Palace Theater, 100 East Main St., Waterbury, for three performances Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 2 and 8 p.m. Tickets are \$64, \$57 and \$52 and can be bought online at palacetheaterct.org, by phone at 203-346-2000, or in person at the box office.