

Sarah Lamb at the 2000 NYIBC

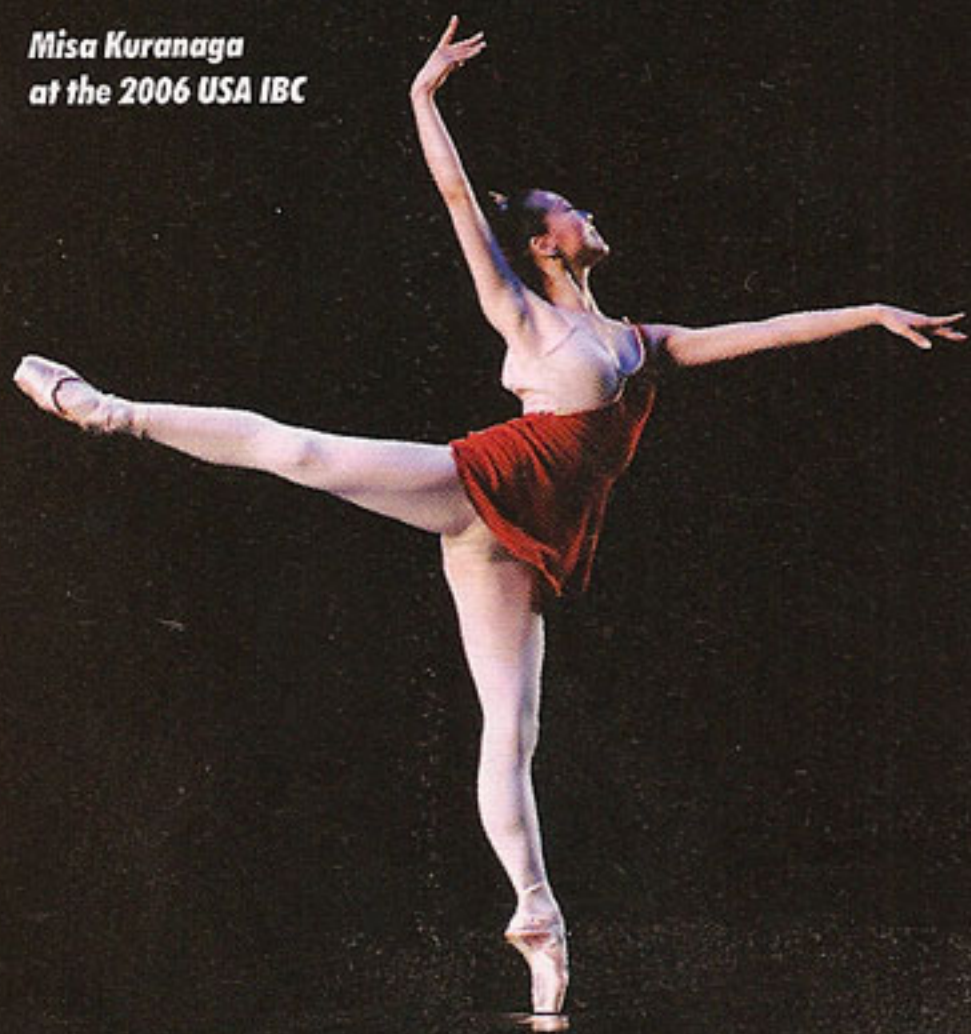
# Ballet COMPETITIONS

# 101

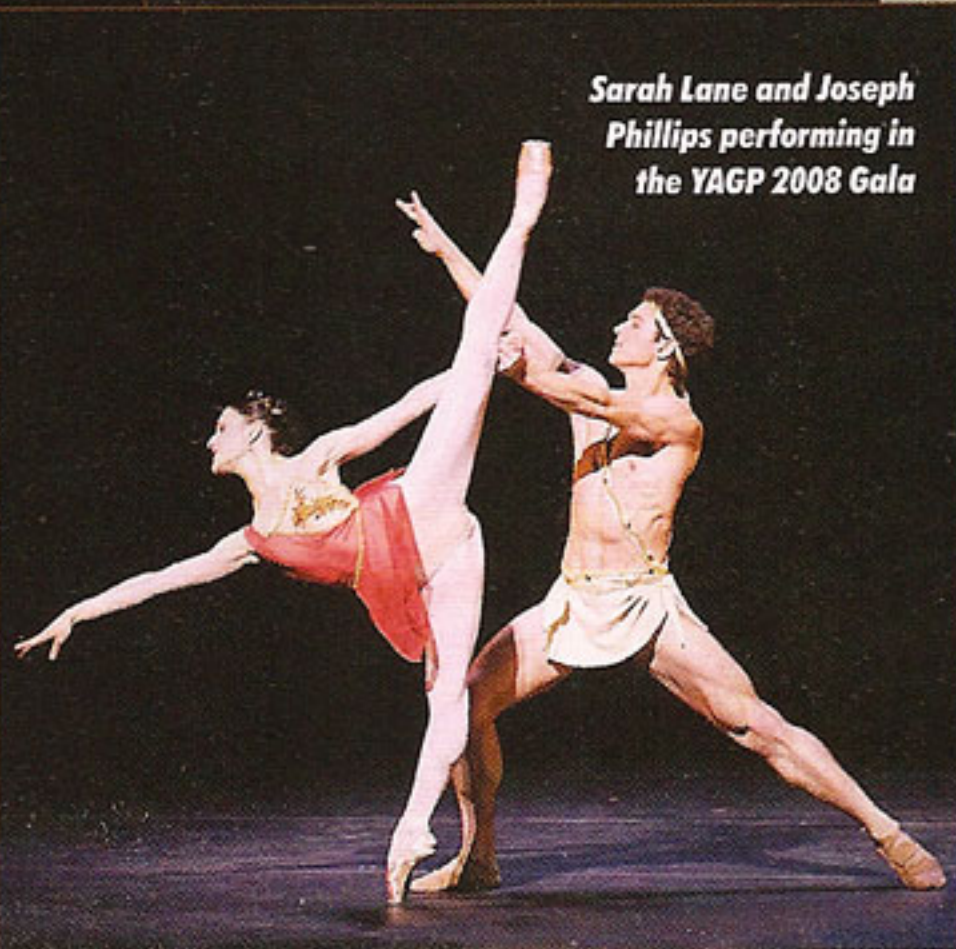
By Julie Diana

WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Misa Kuranaga at the 2006 USA IBC



Sarah Lane and Joseph Phillips performing in the YAGP 2008 Gala



Jaime Garcia Castilla at the 2001 Prix de Lausanne

Picture this: It's 1990, and Jose Manuel Carreño, a young, relatively unknown Cuban ballet student, has just wowed the judges at the USA International Ballet Competition with his ultra-powerful jumps and incredibly controlled pirouettes. At the end of the competition, he's presented with the Grand Prix City of Jackson Award of Excellence—a prize even higher than the competition's senior division gold medals. Suddenly, Carreño is on the professional ballet world's radar, and he's quickly snatched up by the English National Ballet. Fast-forward to today: Carreño is living every ballet dancer's dream as an internationally renowned

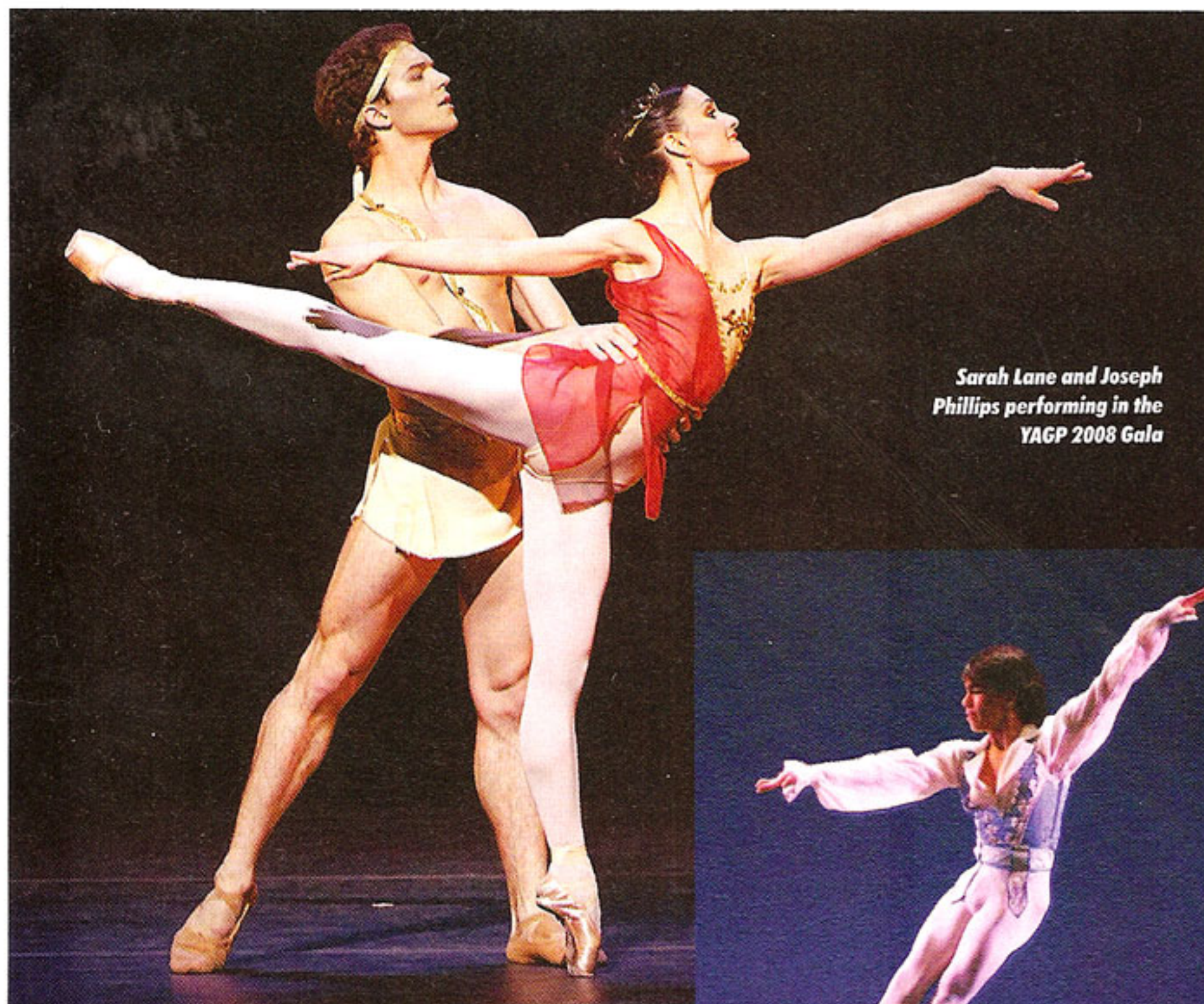
principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre.

At their best, ballet competitions do just what they did for Carreño, catapulting young unknowns into the limelight. At their worst, they're still a great learning experience. While most dancers won't win medals, nearly all competitors will benefit from the preparation, performance opportunities and feedback from judges.

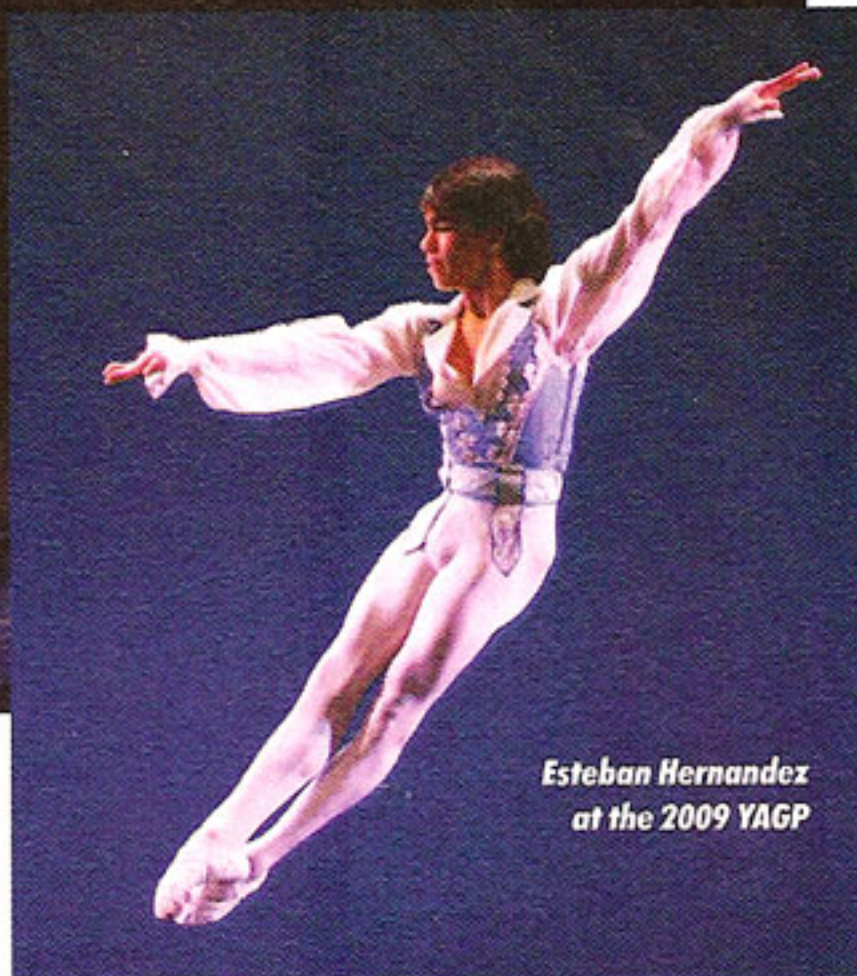
The four major ballet competitions each have different vibes and offer different opportunities. To help you figure out which one is right for you, *DS* put together a guide highlighting key aspects of each.

## THE Basics

Most ballet competitions accept dancers ages 15–19 and expect you to bring prepared variations, both classical and contemporary. Some provide scholarships, while others award medals and professional contracts.



Sarah Lane and Joseph Phillips performing in the YAGP 2008 Gala



Esteban Hernandez at the 2009 YAGP

## YOUTH AMERICA GRAND PRIX (YAGP)

YAGP is a competition for *everybody*. Its goal is to find new talent, and any dancer age 9–19 can compete.

“One of the things that sets us apart from other competitions is our wide age range,” says Sergey Gordeev, director of PR and external affairs. “We include very young dancers, and rather than just evaluating them wherever they are in their development, we try to identify their potential and help them fulfill it by channeling them to world-class dance schools and giving them scholarships to study there.”

Founded in 1999 by the former Bolshoi Ballet dancers Larissa and Gennadi Saveliev, YAGP holds semifinal competitions around the world and a final round in NYC every year. Students compete for medals; for the opportunity to receive contracts from professional companies; for the chance to perform at various international galas and dance festivals; and for scholarships to leading dance academies, like the Royal

Ballet School, the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at American Ballet Theatre and the Royal Danish Ballet School. Though medalists at the NYC finals receive cash prizes, the scholarships have little to do with first, second or third place. Instead, “representatives from big schools observe competitors and judge their potential based on their performance onstage and in class,” Gordeev says.

**NEXT COMPETITION DATE:** March 21–25, 2010 (NYC finals)

**FAMOUS ALUMNI:** Sara Mearns (2001), principal, New York City Ballet; Sarah Lane (2002), soloist, American Ballet Theatre; Kiril Kulish and David Alvarez (2006), Tony Award recipients for their performances in the title role of *Billy Elliot* on Broadway

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** [yagp.org](http://yagp.org)

“Preparation for the YAGP helps me with my technique and artistry. I also love being able to perform variations that I’ve been working on with my coaches and teachers.”

—Esteban Hernandez, gold medalist 2008 and grand prix winner 2009, student at The Rock School

## Reasons TO COMPETE

**PREPARATION:** A competition requires lengthy preparation, focusing on artistic and technical details. This intensive training helps build discipline and pushes you to be your best. “The process is the prize,” says Bo Spassoff, co-director of The Rock School.

**EDUCATION:** Where else can you meet, watch and interact with dancers from all over the world? “Use it as a learning experience,” says Carlos Molina, a Boston Ballet principal who won the Igor Youskevitch Award at the NYIBC in 1996. “Take the opportunity to learn from other dancers.” And if you make a friend or two, that’s even better, especially since many of the dancers you meet will end up being your co-workers in the future!

**PERFORMANCE:** Ballet competitions offer amazing performance opportunities, particularly for dancers from smaller studios. It’s not often that 16-year-olds get to tackle Odile’s furious turns or Kitri’s tricky hops on pointe onstage—except in competition! Performing challenging ballerina roles will strengthen your technique and your artistry, and give you the chance to command a professional stage.

**EXPOSURE:** Competitions guarantee visibility, even if you don’t take the top prize. “You don’t have to win a medal to earn a place in a company,” says Sue Lobrano, executive director of the USA IBC. “Many directors are looking for a particular type of dancer and hire non-medalists all the time.”