

Youth America Grand Prix Announces 2005 Season

America's biggest international student ballet competition opens new season by announcing two new international scholarships, moving to a bigger venue, welcoming ABT star Ethan Stiefel to its Board of Directors, and forming an affiliation with UNESCO

by Sergey Gordeev

YOUTH AMERICA GRAND PRIX – America's premier international student ballet and contemporary dance scholarship competition – opens its 2005 season by announcing two newest additions to its distinguished roster of scholarship presenters. Italian La Scala Ballet School and the New Zealand School of Dance will join 24 other leading dance schools worldwide in presenting over \$150,000 in scholarships to YAGP participants. The season's news also include the star of ABT Ethan Stiefel's joining the YAGP Board of Directors, moving of the YAGP 2005 Gala to New York's historic City Center, and establishing an affiliation with UNESCO's International Dance Council.

"The New Zealand School of Dance is honoured and excited to have been chosen as a Youth America Grand Prix scholarship presenter," said Garry Trinder, the School's Director. "YAGP has demonstrated strong artistic vision whilst placing an overt emphasis on the educational needs of young dancers. This competition acts as a stepping stone for pre-professional students and instills the knowledge and confidence to propel them toward a career in dance." Anna Maria Prina, the Director of the La Scala Ballet School, will serve as the representative for the School at the New York City Finals scheduled to take place April 14-18, 2005.

The New York City Finals will serve as the culmination of a full season of U.S. and international semi-final competitions. YAGP 2005 U.S. semi-finals include Irving, TX and Philadelphia, PA on January 29-30, Long Beach, CA on February 4-6, Chicago, IL on February 11-13, Orlando, FL on February 19-20, Denver, CO on February 26-27, Torrington, CT on March 5-6, and Greenville, SC on March 12-13. At this time, limited spaces are still available for late registration to some of the regional semi-final locations.

The general theme of YAGP's new season seems to be "bigger and better" in 2005. "Not only did we add more regional semi-final locations in the United States, now covering eight metropolitan areas throughout the U.S., but we also formed alliances with major



ABT Principal Dancers Angel Corella and Renata Pavam performed at YAGP 2004 Fifth Anniversary Gala at Lincoln Center.



ABT Principal Dancers Irina Dvorozenko and Maxim Belotserkovsky performed at YAGP 2004 Fifth Anniversary Gala at Lincoln Center. Photos by Dave Friedman.



Sang-Yi Han, 18 (Korea) received the Bronze Medal in Senior women's category at YAGP '04

dance competitions, festivals and organizations around the world, allowing our participants a much greater access into the international dance community," says the founder and Artistic Director of the competition, Larissa Saveliev.

Co-Founder of YAGP, ABT soloist Gennadi Saveliev explains, "In September 2004, YAGP joined forces with the Campos do Jordao dance festival in Brazil, opening a regional semi-final competition there. Brazil has emerged as a very important country in the world of dance; it has a vibrant dance scene and is home to some of the world's best dance students and teachers, so we are very excited about forming a relationship with that country. Also in September we conducted a semi-final round in China as part of the 50th Anniversary celebration of the preeminent Beijing Dance Academy. Dance professionals from all over the world gathered in Beijing, and it was an honor for us to make a special presentation about Youth America Grand Prix's mission to raise the standards of dance education worldwide and to conduct special YAGP auditions for several hundred Chinese dance students."

The competition's international plans also include an upcoming semi-final round in Tokyo, Japan on January 14-16, 2005, as well as future semi-final rounds in San Paulo, Brazil in September 2005 and in Cordoba, Mexico in October 2005. Another international YAGP semi-final is planned for Canada in the 2006 season.

YAGP's mission to raise the standards of dance education in America has been the subject of much discussion in the U.S. and international media and the reason for commendations by many dance professionals (it even garnered enthusiastic endorsements from NYC Mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg). Yet it was the competition's committed efforts to foster the exchange of talent between America and the international dance community that attracted the attention of UNESCO's

International Dance Council, or "CID" – Conseil International de Danse.

Serving for many year's as "the world headquarters of dance," CID is not only a professional association uniting some of the world's most influential dance organizations, but also an extensive network of exclusive opportunities available to its members. Membership in the organization, however, is reserved for only those organizations that meet its highest standards of excellence and

relevance to the international dance community. Only two other ballet competitions in the United States have had the honor of being accepted into the prestigious CID alliance: USA International Ballet Competition in Jackson, MI and the New York International Ballet Competition – both professional ballet competitions that have proven themselves worthy of the CID membership over the years.

"We are extremely proud to be recognized in such a way and to be accepted into this distinguished company in only 5 years of YAGP's existence," say the Savelievs. And proud they should be, indeed – YAGP became the first student ballet competition in America to join the CID.

Olga Smoak, the Chairperson of CID's legal committee, recommended YAGP for inclusion in the CID and acted as an international consultant to YAGP. "Because of its commitment to fostering dance education worldwide, YAGP is a perfect match for the CID," she stated. "CID's core values and aims are to encourage the training of performers and choreographers, promote the knowledge of dance in general, and to protect the dance heritage; so it is very fitting that Youth America Grand Prix – an organization that has done so much to educate the younger generation of artists around the world – should not only become a member, but be accepted by the CID as a distinguished international competition. CID/UNESCO represents the interests of the world of dance by acting as a global forum, and it brings together the resources of national and international dance organizations. As such, it will be in the position to assist Youth America Grand Prix in its mission to promote international dance education."

YAGP 2005 season will also see the addition of Ethan Stiefel, Principal Dancer of American Ballet Theatre, to the organization's Board of Directors. Stiefel has been a long-time supporter of the competition as a contributor, guest performer, and a spokesperson. In 2005, his dedication led him to being elected as a member of the Board, where, among others, he will join his former colleague Susan

Jaffe, who currently serves as the competition's Artistic Coordinator.

The final news of the season is the relocation of the traditional YAGP Closing Night Gala – featuring the winners of the competition and the stars of ABT, NYCB and other leading dance companies – from its traditional home at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall to the historic New York City Center due to the high demand for Gala tickets and City Center's larger seating capacity.

Built in 1923 as a meeting hall for the members of the Ancient Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, the spacious 2,750-seat theater has become Manhattan's first performing arts center in 1943 and has been home to the best of theater, music, and dance ever since. Some of the world's most celebrated and well-respected ballet stars and dance companies have performed on its famous stage, including the American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet (which, along with the New York City Opera, originated at City Center), Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Eifman Ballet of St. Petersburg, and virtually every international dance company touring in New York.

The theme of the YAGP 2005 Gala – scheduled for April 18th, 2005 – will be the highlight on the European dance companies. Artists from the renowned La Scala Ballet, Stuttgart Ballet, and Paris Opera Ballet have been invited to perform alongside artists from ABT, NYCB, and the winners of YAGP. "I believe this will be an important chance for American and international dance students to see and learn from the extraordinary artistry of leading European dancers," says Larissa Saveliev. Tickets to the YAGP 2005 Gala are available now by visiting the New York City Center website – www.citycenter.org. The organizers recommend purchasing tickets early, pointing out that in the past three years the YAGP Galas have been 100% sold-out several weeks before the performance date.

Created in 1999 by two former Bolshoi Ballet dancers, Larissa and Gennadi Saveliev, YAGP celebrated its Fifth Anniversary season in April of 2004. Since then, over 4,000 young dancers from around the world have participated in YAGP competitions and master-classes with internationally recognized dance professionals. Over half a million dollars have been awarded in scholarships to the world's leading dance schools, and over 100 YAGP alumni are now dancing with some 30 companies around the world.

Late registration for select U.S. semi-finals is still available at the time of this publication. The competition is open to dancers of all nationalities ages 9-19 and offers an option of entering by video preliminary for those dancers who are unable to attend the semi-final rounds. For more information and registration, visit www.yagp.org.