

Youth America ballet competition

open to public

Compiled By Don Thomas

Three hundred of the best young dancers ages 9 to 19 from around the globe will descend on New York City for a week to compete for \$250,000 in scholarships and coveted spots with leading dance companies worldwide at the 10th annual Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP), to be held from April 17 to 22 at the Skirball Center for the Performing Arts (566 LaGuardia Place, at Washington Square South) and New York City Center (130 W. 56 St.) in Manhattan.

The young dancers — selected from more than 5,000 youngsters who have competed in regional competitions throughout the year in a dozen cities as well as in Japan, Europe, Mexico and Brazil — will spend their week in New York City in training, seminars and competitions, performing before some of the ballet's leading directors and teachers.

The competition will culminate with the Final Round on Tuesday, April 21 at 7 pm. at New York City Center. Alternately known as the "American Idol" of ballet and the "Internet of dance," YAGP is one of the most anticipated events on dancers', dance professionals' and dance fans' calendars each year, functioning as it does as a stepping stone for young dancers to a professional career, as well as an opportunity for top ballet schools and companies worldwide to search for talent and access the future of ballet under one roof during one week in New York City.

Recognized as the world's largest dance talent network, the ever-increasing popularity of YAGP extends again this year as the 2009 Final Round at City Center will be open to the general public for the first time, according to founders, the hus-



Carolina Ribeiro, a participant in the Youth American Grand Prix, celebrating its 10th anniversary this month with performances and Gala events in New York.

(Photo: Nan Melville)

band and wife team of Gennadi and Larissa Saveliev, former dancers of the Bolshoi Ballet.

"The Final Round used to be open just to the YAGP competitors and a few YAGP supporters. But the demand from audiences to see the best young dancers in the world compete in one Final Round kept growing, so we finally decided to hold the Final Round at City Center,

whose large seating capacity will allow us to share this electrifying experience with the general public," says Larissa Saveliev, artistic director.

In addition to being eligible for scholarship money and potential job offers from major dance companies, YAGP finalists will also be in line to perform on the City Center stage with a host of professional ballet dancers from

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such renowned companies as Stuttgart Ballet, Bolshoi Ballet, New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre and San Francisco Ballet at Youth America Grand Prix's 10th anniversary gala, "Stars of Today Meet the Stars of Tomorrow," on Thursday, April 22 at 7 pm.

Youth America Grand Prix was founded as America's first student ballet scholarship competition and has quickly become one of the most watched programs in the dance world. More than 25,000 young dancers have competed in the international dance competitions since it began in 1999.

YAGP has awarded more than \$2 million in scholarship money, and more than 250 of its alumni now perform in such celebrated dance companies as American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet and San Francisco Ballet, among others.

This year's YAGP Gala will train the spotlight on past, present and future as the roster of dancers for the April 22nd "Stars of Today Meet the Stars of Tomorrow" concert at City Center will be comprised of alumni from major companies along with young dancers from the 2009 finals competition. A total of more than 5,000 dancers are expected to have participated in the 2009 YAGP domestic and international competitions this year in preparation for the April finals competition.

To date, winners who will travel to New York City have been chosen from contests held in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Denver, Dallas, Chicago, Spartanburg, South Carolina; Japan, Brazil, Mexico and Europe.

One of the key elements of Youth America Grand Prix programs is to provide opportunities for talented youngsters who might otherwise have been over-

looked were it not for YAGP's grassroots competition and mentoring programs.

"We have quite a few examples of YAGP alumni who have been overlooked in large company auditions, but were noticed at YAGP and are now rising stars at such companies as American Ballet Theatre, San Francisco Ballet, Houston Ballet, and others," says Larissa.

At every level, from local competitions and the Finals in New York City, YAGP dancers are seen, taught, guided and judged by an impressive array of directors and faculty members from some of the top ballet programs in the world, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet, Australian Ballet School, Canada's National Ballet School, Stuttgart Ballet (Germany), La Scala Ballet Academy (Italy), Paris Opera Ballet School, and England's Royal Ballet School.

Co-founder of YAGP Gennadi Saveliev notes that the most successful aspect of Youth America Grand Prix is that it functions as much more than a mere dance competition. "YAGP is an ongoing international festival of dance, a global network that keeps working throughout the year, connecting dancers, students, festivals, companies and schools worldwide." For tickets to the YAGP Final Round visit www.nycitycenter.org, or purchase tickets in person at the City Center Box Office located at West 55th Street between 6 & 7th Avenues.

Competitions and classes from April 17 to 20 prior to the Final Round on April 21 will be held at the Skirball Center for the Performing Arts at New York University. For more information about Youth America Grand Prix visit the organization's website at www.yagp.org