

ARTS & LEISURE

APRIL 19, 2009

Great dancers are made, not born

Youth America Grand Prix once again offers students a chance to shine — and earn a scholarship in the process

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The Billy Elliot saga — gifted country boy with ballet ambitions beats stiff odds — doesn't much resemble the formative years of many dancers.

They start very young. They spend far more time in class and in rehearsal than they spend on stage. Training takes years and never ends.

For every star, there are 30 talented non-stars. It's a grueling regimen.

Still, there are spot-lit moments. Thousands of students interact annually with Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP), an international competition/showcase that evaluates and rewards trainees from all over the world.

It is a network of competitions, workshops and presentations, awarding prizes, scholarships and jobs.

For audiences and ballet brass, YAGP peers into the future. The kids in this spring's program will be the leading lights five, 10 or 15 years from now.

Three of the four current Billy Elliots are past YAGP awardees.

SPECIAL ACCESS

For this year's 10th anniversary, YAGP is offering special (and very affordable) access later this week at City Center. For the first time, the public is being invited to the final, competitive rounds on Tuesday at 8 p.m.

Tickets are \$25. Visit www.nycitycenter.org or call 212-581-1212.

The following night, at the YAGP gala, the fledgling dancers — dozens and dozens — will share the stage with professional grownup guests.

On the list: Irina Dvorovento, Marcel Gomes and Gillian Murphy (American Ballet Theater), Jared Angle, Maria Kowroski, Ashley Boudier, Zachary Clark and Sarah Means (New York City Ballet), James Moore (Pacific Northwest Ballet) and dancers from the Stuttgart, National Ballet of Canada, Marinsky and Dutch National Ballet, Berlin State Opera Ballet and MOMIX.

Founded 10 years ago by Larissa and Gennadi Saveliev, YAGP has awarded more than \$2 million in scholarships. At present, 200 YAGP alumni are dancing in 50 companies around the world.

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Kiril Kulish, a YAGP kid, now starring in "Billy Elliot."



PHOTO COURTESY YAGP