

# En l'Air

News from  
MASSACHUSETTS  
ACADEMY of  
BALLET  
Educational Training  
Association

SPRING  
2016



Sara Soares, Athina Alimonos and Zoe Watson take a quick photo during Senior Division open stage time at the Connecticut Classic ballet competition in Torrington, CT March 6. More photos inside. Photo: Charles Flachs



For years, Cathy Johnson has been getting MAB students off to a strong start! Photo: Charles Flachs

## Is Ballet a Competition?

by Rose and Charles Flachs

Charles and Rose are not necessarily proponents of looking at ballet training through a competition lens. Ballet is after all an art form, not a competitive sport. Professional ballet dancers never get a "score" for rehearsing, performing and artistry.

However, students can learn a great deal from the process that leads up to competing, (many rehearsals perfecting the details of technique and artistry) and from meeting teachers and students at competitions. This year, a select few of our students participated in the Connecticut Classic Ballet Competition and the Youth American Grand Prix Regional Competition in Boston. At both venues, students took master classes, learned variations and performed their solos.

We are proud of how our students represented the Academy at both venues. Competing at the Connecticut Classic Competition on March 6 were Emma Jane Konkoly, Sarah Soares, and Zoe Watson who performed stellar variations from *Paquita*, demonstrating clear, clean and artistic ballet technique. Also competing was Emma Spillane, performing variations from *Harlequinade* and *Don Quixote*, who was awarded eighth place in the junior division. Athina Alimonos, performing variations from *La Esmeralda* and *Grand Pas Classique*, won the gold medal in the senior division.

Athina and Emma continued competing at the Boston Youth America Grand Prix, March 18-20. Both repeated their classical variations and performed contemporary

## Cathy Johnson to Retire

Some very big news from MAB is that Cathy Johnson—our pre-ballet coordinator, level 1 and 2 teacher, and adult intermediate ballet instructor—has announced that she will soon leave the area to pursue a life of leisure on Cape Cod. Her last day with us is June 4th.

We are happy for Cathy, but we will miss her terribly. Cathy has been an integral part of our school, from teaching many different levels to helping Rose lay the Studio 2 sprung floor. Cathy's husband, Jeff, joined Charles in building our studio, laying floors, tearing up floors and laying more floors. Cathy and Jeff always volunteer and always go beyond the call of duty at MAB events. Their dedication to, and enthusiasm for, MAB will be difficult to

Continued on page 3

Continued on page 3

The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet

4 Open Square Way, Studio 403•Holyoke, MA 01040•413.536.6200•massacademyofballet.com



## MAB Students Perform for Local Seniors

A group of MAB students performed during February vacation week for residents of Loomis Village (South Hadley) and Heritage Woods Assisted Living Facility (Agawam). Here are a few of their comments about the experience:



Level 4 and 5 dancers performed class combinations



Emma Spillane performed her solo variation from *Harlequinade*



Level 4 and 5 students Nolan Saito (violin), May Saito (violin), and Lila Norton (cello) added a string trio to the senior center performances.

*"I had a great time performing for the seniors. I thought it was a great chance for them to get some knowledge and learn more about the art of ballet. I also thought it was a nice way for them to see young performers with lots of potential and be inspired by the art of it all. I also thought it was really great for them to see us because they might not be able to go out anymore. It is also a great opportunity for all of the dancers to get used to performing to an audience and practice your performing skill. In conclusion, I thought going to the senior centers was a great idea for them to see us and for us to perform."*

—Lila Norton

*"I had a great time performing at the senior center because I enjoyed making the senior citizens happy. I also enjoyed getting to dance all day because it's what I love to do."*

—Emma Spillane

*"I enjoyed performing at the senior center because I liked to see the excitement on everyone's faces. Also, I loved performing away from the studio, and in a different environment. I also enjoyed showing off different skills, and just letting everything go!"*

—Amber Fournier

*"It was an amazing experience to be able to share the awesomeness of ballet with people who don't (or do) have much knowledge in that area. It was very fun, and I hope that we will be able to go back soon!"*

—Nolan Saito



The students also shared excerpts from their Jazz and Modern classes.





*Cathy demonstrates technique to adult intermediate students  
Cathy Johnson, continued from page 1*

replace. Cathy has said that while she and Jeff look to start a new chapter in their lives, she will take with her many fond memories of her work throughout the years with MAB's wonderful students and their lovely families.

Please join us in congratulating Cathy on her retirement and expressing our thanks for her dedicated teaching, volunteering, and friendship to the MAB community through the years.



*Competitions, continued from page 1*

solos choreographed by Charles Flachs. Following Emma's contemporary performance Charles met with Wendy Perron, one of the judges, and Larissa Saveliev, co-founder of YAGP about choreography for competitors. Wendy Perron wrote an interesting article on the *Dance Magazine* blog that can be read at this address: <http://dancemagazine.com/views/competitions-the-pressure-to-go-acrobatic/>

Athina placed in the top 24 of the senior classical division. Emma Spillane placed in the top twelve in the classical competition and received third place in the contemporary category for juniors. Emma Spillane was invited to the New York Finals and will compete April 23-25th.

Classical ballet, like anything really worth doing, is competitive, but in the end, the dancers are mainly competing with themselves, working hard every day in class and rehearsal. Congratulations to all of the MAB dancers who competed this year! Great job!



*Photos top to bottom, left to right:  
Warner Theatre in Torrington,  
Rose & Emma warm up, dancer  
families in Torrington, May joins  
Emma Jame and Emma during  
Open Stage, Athina as La Esmer-  
alda, Athina wins the gold medal  
at CT Classic, Emma recognized  
at CT Classic, Athina & Emma  
at YAGP, all competitors at CT  
Classic, Emma & Athina at CT  
Classic, and Emma onstage at  
YAGP in Dance Magazine photo*





# Scenes from Nutcracker & Sweets 2015

Photos by Doug Brega







### Meanwhile, behind the scenes...



Mary and Christy staff the Nutcracker gifts table



The Skinner grandparents are assigned to the servants' room?!



Grandmother Skinner prepares the maids for a big evening



Lorán & Hannah are ready for emergency costume repairs



Louisa & Nora handle lights and sound



Arlene & Hannah spruce up Minib's Sugar Plum Fairy costume



Parent volunteers wait in the "wings"

Love the pictures?  
Follow Massachusetts Academy of Ballet on:



Instagram



## Our Seniors' Finale

by Nancy Lacey



Rose honors Emmie and Minh with flowers at the final Nutcracker show

Spring has finally arrived and with it comes the final reverence from MAB for our seniors, Emmie Peterson and Minh Sullivan. MAB seniors are unique. In this often too competitive world, they have the resilience and dedication to pursue the study of ballet year after year. There are no trophies given or prizes awarded, just sore muscles and feet that can point toward the floor, countless hours perfecting variations and combinations and a devotion to the art that leaves little time for anything else. They compete with themselves, using corrections from their teachers to better their practice. They exude the essence of what ballet truly is: grace and self-confidence.

MAB seniors assume leadership roles within our dance community. They are the ones that the younger girls look up to and look forward to emulating when they reach Level 5. How many times did I observe, during *Nutcracker*, a flower or a doll mimicking the Sugar Plum Fairy or Snow? These younger girls understand that they must earn their place among the older girls—it is not simply given. Our seniors

demonstrate all that is good at MAB; they are pleasant, well-mannered and disciplined. They are quick with a smile for adults or younger children and can often be seen laughing prior to class starting. One thing seniors do not have a lot of is TIME. To that end, I gave each of our seniors a questionnaire and asked them to record their responses.

### How long have you been doing ballet at MAB?

E: About 7 years, in the wrong colored leotard!

M: I heard about MAB in 6<sup>th</sup> grade through an older friend named Joanna Gomez who told me that MAB had great training and teachers. At first ballet was not my favorite type of dance to do, but over the course of 7 years I have grown to love it very much.

### What school do you currently attend?

E: The MacDuffie School in Granby

M: Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School (PVPA) in South Hadley

### What are your plans for after high school?

E: I am going to college, but am in the process of deciding which school to choose.

M: After high school I want to go to college and get a BFA in dance at a college with a conservatory type program. I have applied to a number of programs over the last few months and have narrowed my choices down to two places; Alonzo King LINES BFA program at Dominican University or the Boston Conservatory.

### Has ballet prepared you for life? How?

E: Definitely, in setting long and short term goals and just working hard to get better.

M: With my ballet training there has come discipline, physical and mental strength, and challenges that have helped me prepare for life. Dance is a passion and something that I really love but it is also a responsibility. You have to be very committed to your passion and take every opportunity you can to practice and get better. Ballet is very physically and mentally demanding. I learned how strong you have to be when I was given the roles of Snow and Sugar Plum Fairy. In both roles you have to have strong stamina and an optimistic mind. Snow is seven minutes long and in Sugar Plum my ankles would give out very easily so I had to mentally tell myself that I could finish the dances. Ballet has taught me to overcome these kind of challenges and to always keep pushing myself out of my comfort zone to be my best self.

### When you're not dancing, what are you doing?

E: At this point in my life, studying. When I'm not studying I'm spending time with friends.

M: Although dance takes up a lot of my time, I love to travel. My favorite place that I have traveled to is Vietnam. Another "hobby" of mine would be eating food. I love food.



*The "Belle's Bedroom" crew at the 2015 MAB Wistariahurst Nutcracker & Sweets. Emme back row 2nd from the right, Minh front row far right*

**Favorite "go to" meal after a day of ballet?**

E: Noodles are good. Also crepes. Just food in general.

M: My ideal "go to meal" after a day of ballet would be Vietnamese food. Anything from egg rolls to Pho or a Banh Mi sandwich.

**In ten years I see myself...**

E: I don't have a ten years plan because if I did it would probably change.

M: In ten years I hope to be dancing with a company whether it is modern based, ballet, or contemporary.

**If I didn't spend so many hours dancing, I would probably be...**

E: Maybe doing some other art form; I used to play the flute. Honestly, I don't know what I would do-that's why I dance.

M: Getting better grades.

**Who drove you to and from ballet?**

E: My mother and Sarah's brother, Ian, after school. Thank you to both of them!

M: Over the past seven years many people have driven me to ballet such as Anna Lusnia, Isabelle Haas, Deb and Kent Lusnia, Kaitlyn Payne and last but not least my Mom and Dad!

**Anything else you'd like to say?**

E: Thank you to everyone at MAB for making it a wonderful place to be. Thank you to Rose and Charles and all the teachers there. I'm very grateful and happy to be a student here!

M: I would like to thank Rose and Charles for being incredible teachers and mentors who have helped me become the dancer I am today. I have improved so much since coming to MAB and I have fallen in love with ballet over the past seven years. I would also like to mention and give a shout out to all the amazing friends that I have met through MAB, past and present. From wacky tacky Wednesdays, coordinating outfits for holidays and having loads of fun, I will never forget the memories that I have made with every one of you!

Thank you Emmie and Minh for your delightful, thought-filled, and funny (!) responses. The end of the ballet year at MAB is bittersweet. It is the end, yet the beginning of a new exciting chapter in the story of our seniors' lives. We wish Emmie and Minh all the best as they embark on a new dance that will help choreograph the next phase of their lives. Merde.

Excel and **GROW** as a dancer this summer!

**Massachusetts Academy of Ballet Summer Programs**



**Pre-Ballet Workshop: Age 5-8**

July 11-15  
M-F 9:00-12:00 PM

**Ballet Intensive Levels 1 and 2: Age 9-10**

July 18 - July 29  
M-F 9:30-3:00

**Ballet Intensive for Level 3A & 3B: Age 10-13**

July 18 - August 12  
M-F 9:30-4:00

**Ballet Intensive for Levels 4 & 5: Advanced**

July 18 to August 12  
M-TH 9:30-5:00 F 9:30-4:00

**Adult Open Classes**

June 14 to August 11  
Adult Intermediate:  
Tuesday, Thursday 9:30-11:00 am  
Adult Beginning/Intermediate:  
Tuesday 6:00-7:30 pm

Full details at [massacademyofballet.com/summer](http://massacademyofballet.com/summer)  
Register now! 10% discount if paid by May 1.

*Save the date!*

**SPRING DANCE PERFORMANCE**

May 28, 2:00 pm  
Holyoke High School

Tickets going on sale soon  
at the MAB front desk



Massachusetts Cultural Council

*Dance with the professionals*



The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet  
4 OPEN SQUARE WAY • STUDIO 403 • HOLYOKE, MA 01040 • 413.536.6200 • WWW.MASSACADEMYOFBALLET.COM