

En l'Air

News from
MASSACHUSETTS
ACADEMY of
BALLET
Educational Training
Association

SPRING
2019



(l to r) May Saito, Chloe Larouche, Nolan Saito and Emery Meroni following their contemporary performances at the Youth America Grand Prix regional competition in Boston

Healthy Competition

by Charles Flachs

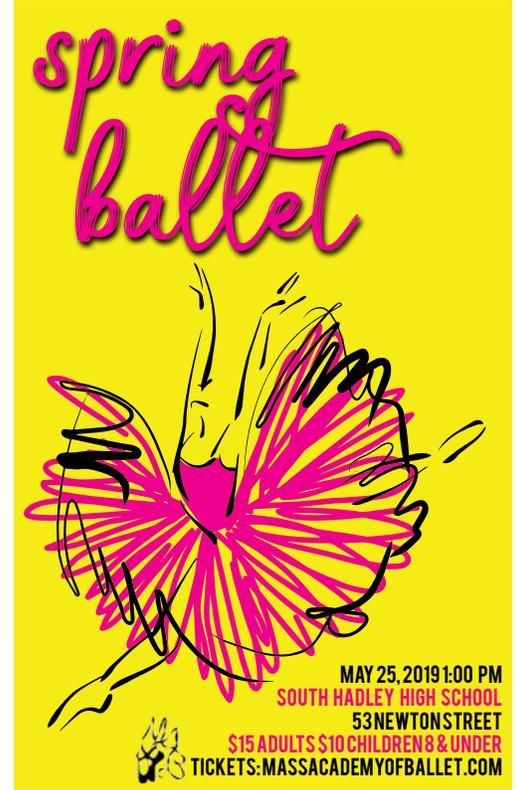
This has been an exciting year at MAB! The dancers have been involved in several projects, some that we have participated in before and some new performances. We again took students to YAGP where they all performed with distinction. Also, we went to the Connecticut Classic and again did very well, with May Saito winning the gold medal for her performance.

What Rose and I have noticed and appreciated the most this year is the healthy competition between dancers. What does that actually mean? If you are competing are you not trying to win and demolish the opponent? This is generally true on the sports field, but for ballet it is different. One of the reasons that we often resist teaching “privates” is that it is part of the student’s education is to be in class with the other dancers in order to progress and see what the competition is. There is exciting motivation that occurs in class with your fellow students which is absent in one-on-one teaching situations. Ballet

and dance in general are community activities – it is not the number of likes you get on Instagram! Our students seem to understand this for the most part and we often see them working together after class on complicated steps and the details of artistry, and only occasionally taking Instagram photos!

Healthy competition actually means that you are looking out for your fellow dancers, helping, coaching, and supporting them as well as trying to do more turns and beats with a higher jump. This is a great thing and is to be encouraged, because after all, in the end, it is the students’ motivation that will ensure their continued success. What better way to accomplish this then to work with their fellow dancers?

We of course again produced our Wistariahurst Nutcracker in December, but we also went for the first time to the 5th Annual Worcester County Dance Festival at the Hanover Theatre. We were one of more than fifteen schools and companies that



performed there in April. In addition, students are performing at a fundraiser for the Holyoke Carousel, with choreography by Debra Vega. With the addition of our new contemporary teacher, Marlena Zahm, to our faculty we have given the dancers a full schedule and many performance opportunities throughout this year. The dancers enjoy these challenges, and we look forward to seeing them back in class for our summer session.

Inside

Summer Programs.....	2
The Prize	3
Nutcracker 2018 Photos	4-5
Big Changes, Bright Futures	6
MAB at Boston Ballet.....	6
Vaganova Teacher Training.....	7

The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet

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Summer Programs at MAB

by Rose Flachs

This summer the Academy offers a week-long pre-ballet workshop, a beginning ballet workshop and a four-week exceptional intensive. The faculty includes directors Rose and Charles Flachs and returning faculty Erica Maillet, Risa Peals, Marlena Zahm, and Matisse Madden. We are thrilled to have guest artists Debra Vega and Shakia Johnson as well. During the intensive students will study ballet, pointe, repertory, hip hop, jazz, and modern.

We are thrilled that Risa Peals will be returning from Japan. Risa has been the principal ballet teacher at Tateda Ballet Studio Tokyo, Japan. Her resume includes training at the Goh Ballet Academy, in Vancouver, Canada, and the Mutsumi Ballet Studio (taught by Hiroko Tomoda, former ballet mistress of The Tokyo Ballet), the Russia Ballet Institute, the Kishibe Ballet Studio, and Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan.



Debra Vega will teach jazz classes. Debra danced on Broadway in such shows as A CHRISTMAS CAROL THE MUSICAL (Madison Square Garden Theatre) for four seasons, ANYTHING GOES (Lincoln

Center), FUNNY GIRL (Actors Fund) and also danced for four seasons as a "Radio City Rockette" in the RADIO CITY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR. She has traveled the United States and Europe in National and European Tours such as FAME! THE MUSICAL, CRAZY FOR YOU, and STEEL PIER. Her favorite Regional Theatre productions include A CHORUS LINE (Judy), WIZARD OF OZ (Glinda), A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM (Gymnasia), as well as three other productions of CRAZY FOR YOU and five different productions of WILL ROGERS FOLLIES. Debra is also a proud member of Actor's Equity Association (AEA) and American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA).



MAB is thrilled to welcome guest artist Shakia Johnson, who will teach hip hop. Shakia was born and raised in Springfield, MA and is a graduate of the Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School and Dean College. She received her teaching artist certificate from the National Dance Institute in New York in 2009. Shakia has choreographed and directed more than 40 hip hop, modern, African and lyrical works performed at Trenton Educational

Dance Institute, Rider University, the Princeton School of Ballet and the Bates Dance Festival. She has performed for numerous hip hop events and has opened for concerts by Fat Joe, Jadakiss, 112, Charlie Baltimore, Kima from "Total" and Omarion. In 2005 she choreographed a hip hop number for the Celtics/NBA half-time show. She has toured the U.S. and abroad dancing with Face Da Phlave Entertainment and Illstyle and Peace Productions. She currently teaches Hip Hop Dance and Culture at Mount Holyoke, Amherst, and Smith Colleges.

As always we have a fabulous demonstration of the summer's work on August 16th at 2:00 p.m. Join us! Register now while there are still spots available.

JULY 15-19

Creative Ballet Workshop

Ages 5-7 M-F 8:30am-12noon
dance, improvisation, acting,
games, storytelling
1wk \$250

JULY 15-19

Beginning Ballet Workshop

Ages 8-10 M-F 8:30am-12noon
ballet, improvisation
1wk \$250

JULY 22-AUGUST 16

Intermediate Level

Ballet Intensive

Ages 11-14 M-F 9:30am-4pm
ballet, variations, pointe,
modern, jazz, yoga
1wk \$400 3wk \$700
2wk \$550 4wk \$800

JULY 22-AUGUST 16

Advanced Level

Ballet Intensive

Ages 14+ M-TH 9:30am-5pm
F 9:30am-4pm
ballet, pointe, pas de deux,
repertory, modern, jazz, yoga
1wk \$450 3wk \$800
2wk \$625 4wk \$900

JUNE 18-AUGUST 15

Adult Open Classes

Intermediate TU & TH 9:30-11am
Beginning | Intermediate TU 6-7:30pm
10 Class Card \$150
College Student 10 Class Card \$140
Single Class \$20

summerballet@mab



The Prize

by Loran Saito



The hectic competition season is over. The team—Emery, Chloe, Nolan and May—all performed beautifully and made Rose and Charles and their families and friends proud. The judges in both competitions recognized the MAB dancers: they received some nice scholarship offers and some certificates to hang on the wall, but the real prize was handed to them over and over, starting in September.

Rose and Charles have often said that competitions are not a high priority at MAB. If MAB students want the experience of competing, Rose and Charles support their efforts and help prepare them so they can reach their highest potential, but it requires a major commitment on the part of each student and family. When the academic year launches, participating students begin their training four days a week, including three rehearsals at the end of class. This makes for long days, dinner at 9 pm, late homework, and short nights for everyone. On the positive side, this rigorous schedule also allows the dancers to benefit from focused work on just a few pieces, adding to their overall strength, technique and artistry.

If you have never experienced watching a ballet competition like YAGP or Connecticut Classic, it is worth making the trip to Boston or Worcester or Torrington to check it out. It is an amazing scene. One after another, beautiful, hard-working dancers come out on the stage in gorgeous costumes, and dance classical (and contemporary, at YAGP) variations that represent the culmination of months and months of hard work. Each performance lasts less than two minutes—two minutes! That's all they get! If they slip, or happen to have a bad cold, or get momentarily distracted, there is no do-over. It's stunning and (from a parent's perspective) a bit absurd. And also impressive.

Since my oldest child participated in YAGP seven years ago, I have observed with pride that when MAB dancers take the stage, they do so with strength, grace and confidence. They are ready, and the quality of their training and preparation shines in a very full and intense field of

competitors. Whatever the outcomes of the judges' decisions, the prize that the kids have been earning through their daily discipline and late nights in the studio with Rose and Charles shines through.

I remember when I accompanied May, Emma Jane and Sarah to the dressing room when they performed "In the Mood," (also known as "The Chicken Dance") at YAGP quite a few years back. I recognized an instant vibe of intimidation that other girls their age were sending their way. I said to May, "Stop staring at the competition, and warm up!" There is no doubt that some dancers come to competitions with an intention to intimidate other dancers. I loved watching our MAB team take on that culture at YAGP and Connecticut Classic with their kindness and graciousness to other competitors. Rather than being intimidated, they came home inspired, with new friends, and a new appreciation for the supportive culture at MAB, modeled by Rose's and Charles' support for all of their students.

YAGP and Connecticut Classic had other benefits. Our dancers were invited to participate in master classes where they experienced different teachers' approaches (some exciting, some less so). In those classes they experimented with getting themselves seen, again in a crowded field, through their focus and hard work in class.

As a parent, I am grateful that Rose and Charles gave MAB dancers the opportunity to participate in the competitions this year. I am also glad that they are over—that was a lot of late night driving, not to mention all the butterflies in my stomach as I waited for our dancers to come on stage! The kids learned a lot about themselves, both as people and as dancers. The real prize that they earned through training intensively will always be with them, when the certificates are recycled and the summer programs are over.



Nutcracker 2018

Photos: Ian Smythe and Charles Flachs





Big Changes, Bright Futures

by Becca Paul

“You create your destiny. Hard work, dedication, sacrifice, and taking risks create amazing opportunities.”
Misty Copeland



(l to r) Abby, Emma Jane and May

How do we say goodbye? How do we show appreciation for a place that has given us so much? How do we deal with missing the friends we spend time with every day? How do we bravely face the new journey we embark on as we move on with life?

The answers are all different. Graduating from high school and figuring out what's next is a significant milestone for all. It can be terrifying and exciting. It is a time that can be deeply emotional for not only that person, but the people around them.

Three beautiful young women are ready to take that journey and start on a new path that will lead them to amazing things. Abby Lacey, Emma Jane Konkoly, and May Saito are all moving on. We wanted to shine the spotlight on these talented MAB students before they leave.

Abby Lacey is 18 years old and is graduating from Wilbraham Monson Academy. She will be going to Northeastern University and majoring in chemical engineering. Her journey at MAB began when she was about six years old. She, like Emma Jane and May, shared Cathy Johnson as their first teacher, and remembered her fondly. MAB has been a huge part of Abby's life for a very long time. She says, “In ballet, there are no fans on the sidelines cheering you on or pushing you to do your best – it's really up to the individual dancer to do that for themselves.” With that said, one of the most important things Abby has learned is the “value of self-determination.” She would tell the younger dancers at MAB to always “find the joy in their dancing and to never give up when things might seem difficult.” Abby is excited to take open classes at Boston Ballet. She will miss MAB, and says, “Rose and Charles have created a space that has become almost like a second home. They truly foster a community of dancers that radiates kindness in all that they do. I've made some wonderful friendships in my time at MAB and for those, and much more, I will forever be grateful.”

Emma Jane Konkoly is 18 and graduating from Longmeadow High School. Emma Jane will be attending Fordham University in New York City and is thinking of studying International Relations. Emma Jane looks forward to taking classes around the city and trying different styles, while still focusing on ballet. She has been attending MAB since she was 10 and remembers May as her “first friend at MAB.” Emma Jane loves having her “constant group of MAB friends outside of school.” “Everyone here is so close, and we're all supportive of each other. I am so thankful that I have a group of people with unique perspectives from different places in the area.” Emma Jane continues, “Building a tight-knit community and carrying forward together is something I will always carry with me, and that's because of MAB.”

Some words of wisdom she would offer MAB students: “Don't limit yourself with worries. Try to think positive and believe that you can do things beyond what you think you can do. Work as hard as you possibly can, and show your passion and love for ballet as much as you possibly can.” To Rose and Charles, Emma Jane says, “Thank you so, so, so much for everything. MAB is the best thing that has ever happened to me, and I am so lucky that I have this foundation in my life.”

May Saito will also be taking a new path. May is 17 and has been attending Holyoke Community College. This summer she will travel to Tulsa to attend the Tulsa Ballet summer program. May is hoping to have the opportunity to continue with TB's “second company” program in the fall. May has been at MAB since she was 5. She says that she has made “lifetime friendships” at MAB and, “It kind of helps that we are in the same place every day.” It turns out that May and Emma Jane were born in the same hospital a couple of days apart and were right across the hall from each other. Although they didn't know each other until they met at MAB, it is a testament to how the universe has a way of unknowingly connecting people. “Working really hard on yourself with people who are doing the same thing really helps you bond and form strong friendships,” she says. When thinking about the instruction at MAB, May says she appreciates that “Rose and Charles take it seriously and are very genuine.” The work ethic will be something that she will carry with her, as it is important for anything you do. May will continue with dance and advises, “Senior year is really hard and filled with change. Stay present and focused when you're in the studio.” To Rose and Charles, whom May refers to as “second parents,” she says, “Thank you.”

Rose and Charles will miss these three young women as well. “It has been exciting to mentor them and contribute to their artistic education. Their dedication,

MAB at Boston Ballet

by Loran Saito



On the morning of March 30, MAB classes were canceled, and dancers of all ages and their family members piled into a charter bus for Boston, to watch a matinée performance of Boston Ballet's *Coppélia* at the historic Boston Opera House.

The production was colorful and highly entertaining, with gorgeous costumes, a live orchestra, a cast of badly behaved teenagers and a wronged mad scientist. There was also, of course, a lot of beautiful dancing, and the bus trip home afforded the MAB dancers a chance to replay the show and discuss their favorite dancers and moments.

Following the show, everyone stayed in the theater for a short Q & A session with two members of Boston Ballet's corps de ballet, who talked about what their lives are like as dancers, the rhythms of their working year, how they prepare for a show, and how they stay in shape.

Trips to Boston Ballet have become an annual tradition at MAB. They create a wonderful opportunity for our dancers to spend time together outside the studio, and to enjoy high quality, full-scale professional productions together as a school.

passion, and appreciation for ballet has set a high bar for the younger students to follow.” Rose adds that Abby is a serious student who loves to move and dance in class, Emma Jane rarely misses a class and accepts challenges with a focused approach, and May is at her peak when onstage performing and sharing her artistry with fellow dancers and the audience.” Rose and Charles go on to say, “Every one of our alumni is considered a lifelong member of the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet. They are always welcome here.”

Scenes from the Dressing Room

at the Worcester County Dance Festival

photos: MAB Dancers



ON THE CALENDAR MAB Summer

July 15-August 16, 2019

Summer Break

August 17-September 9

First Day of Classes

September 10

Nutcracker & Sweets

December 13, 14 and 15, 2019

Wistariahurst Museum, Holyoke

Vaganova Teacher's Seminar



Rose Flachs is offering a Vaganova Teacher's Seminar focusing on the first three years of ballet training, June 24th to 29th at Mount Holyoke College.

Rose was introduced to the Vaganova method of teaching from John White and Margarita deSaá of the National Ballet of Cuba and the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet. She was already a professional dancer and had just finished her second season with Ballet West. During her summer layoff, Mr. White suggested she take the seminar he was teaching. "Why should a professional dancer study a teaching methodology?" Rose asked herself. At this time Rose was not considering a career in teaching. She was

only focused on her dancing, improving daily with class and rehearsal.

Taking the seminar changed her life as a dancer. She absorbed every detail like a sponge. She rose from corps, to soloist, and then to principal dancer within the next year. She re-trained herself with the information she learned. The Vaganova syllabus integrates a logical training method incorporating every artistic detail from coordination of movement to expression of port de bras, from developing strength to effortless expression.

Many dancers go on to teach and only draw from what they remember from their classes as students. Teaching classical ballet is an art and an ever developing pedagogy. Seminars such as this are invaluable.

Mr. John White, author of *Teaching Classical Ballet* and *Advanced Principles of Teaching Classical Ballet* will be a guest speaker the first day. Teachers and dancers are invited to register for this life-changing seminar.

See www.massacademyofballet.com for registration information.

MAB Faculty

Rose and Charles Flachs, Directors
Maëndy MacFarland
Matisse Madden
Erica Maillet
Risa Peals
Marlena Zahm

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Photo by Charles Flachs

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