

# En l'Air

News from  
MASSACHUSETTS  
ACADEMY of  
BALLET  
Educational Training  
Association

FALL  
2016



Level 4 & 5 students in the MAB Summer Intensive gather around Arlene to learn sewing skills. Photo: Charles Flachs



Nutcracker 2015. Photo: Doug Brega

## Summer is for Sewing!

by Hannah Black, MABETA Board

Students at this year's summer intensive didn't just improve their turn-out or perfect their pirouettes. If you found yourself at the studio after the lunch break you would have seen our dancers with needles in hand practicing newly acquired sewing skills. The workshop was taught by our resident seamstress extraordinaire Arlene Kowal. She taught students basic hand stitching techniques, how to sew on buttons, hooks, and eyes, and of course how to deal with ribbons and pointe shoes. Each student was given a small sewing kit with all the basics. The highlight of the classes, unsurprisingly, was the final project. Students helped to create either a skirt or shirt that was worn during the in-studio performance. There were many smiles and excited talk as the dancers sat and hemmed their costumes by hand. The classes were a great opportunity for dancers to learn skills that they will use both in and out of the studio.

## A Time to Gain Confidence

by Amber Fournier, Level IV student

MAB's summer intensive was one to never forget. First, the connection I made with both old and new friends was incredible. After four weeks of dancing with each other, you are sure to form strong bonds with those you are around. But, one of the most memorable things was working super hard on my emotion and expression during my dancing. On the last day of the intensive, just before the showcase, Rose and Charles pulled me out into the hallway. To be honest, I was a bit nervous at first, but then they told me they had noticed my emotion and expression during one of the variations, and they thought that I had improved a lot over the summer. This made me super happy, and I flew through the performance with great confidence. The advances I made over the summer continue to help me in my classes now, and I would not give up the experience for anything!

## Nutcracker & Sweets 2016

The maids at Wistariahurst are polishing the silver, Grandfather Skinner is placing gifts for the grandchildren under the tree, Ruth and Young William are watching for guests' arrival at the window, and the Wistariahurst mice are making plans of their own... MAB's Nutcracker & Sweets cannot be far off! Join us for this intimate performance of the beloved classic, set in a Holyoke mansion at the turn of the century.

This year's performances are

Friday, December 16, 4:00 pm  
Friday, December 16, 6:30 pm  
Saturday, December 17, 11:30 am  
Saturday, December 17, 2:00 pm  
Saturday, December 17, 4:30 pm  
Sunday, December 18, 11:30 am  
Sunday, December 18, 2:00 pm  
Sunday, December 18, 4:30 pm

Tickets sell out quickly! Get yours today at [wistariahurst.org](http://wistariahurst.org).

# The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet

4 Open Square Way, Studio 403•Holyoke, MA 01040•413.536.6200•[massacademyofballet.com](http://massacademyofballet.com)



## Stretching Our Arms into the Community

by Maureen Moriarty, MABETA Board



This summer, Crystal Menninga was very busy teaching and dancing. In addition to teaching Level 3 for the MAB Summer Intensive, she was also busy working at the South Hadley Public Library, conducting a ninety-minute dance workshop every Wednesday in July for their "On Your Mark, Get Set, DANCE" series. Nora Buonagurio (who teaches at MAB on Saturdays) assisted Crystal in this challenging endeavor.

Each workshop focused on a different theme with dance, including Dance in Athletics; Fairies, Witches, and Warlocks; Dance and the Circus; and Dance and Rhythm. Crystal explained that "each workshop was structured in a similar fashion—we did a group warmup, learned some dance movement, watched a few videos of what we were studying, did a craft, and used our craft to enhance our dance. Our sessions were packed! We made magic wands for the fairies, witches, and warlocks, tambourines for dance in athletics, aerialists on a trapeze for dance and the circus, and banjos for dance and rhythm."

The twenty children, ages five through ten, who attended the workshops enjoyed learning ideas they could take with them and use at home or with their friends. "I loved seeing a room full of boys and girls having fun while exploring different facets of dance. We learned that dance is great for everyone and is lots of fun!"

Now that summer is over, Crystal returned to teaching French at a local high school where she also runs the French and Circus Clubs. You can also find her teaching Pre-Ballet, Level 1, and Level 3A Ballet and an Adult Tap class at MAB, coaching circus arts at SHOW Circus Studio, helping people discover the joy of flying trapeze, teaching piano, continuing her training as an aerialist, and performing as a circus and dance artist. (Whew!) You may also have spotted Crystal as a 9' flamingo at the Amherst



*Photos courtesy of South Hadley Public Library*

Block Party! When asked how she spends her (rare) leisure time, Crystal responded, "I enjoy spending time with my many critters (dogs, birds, a mouse, and a turtle). I call them my circus animals-in-training, although their best talent is napping."

In closing, Crystal states, "I'm so glad to be part of the MAB family, and I can't wait to see everyone at Nutcracker. Don't forget to wave to the white-haired Mrs. Skinner as she runs back and forth from the light booth!"

## Russian Summer

by Bernita Spagnoli, MABETA Board

Three MAB dancers, Emma Jane Konkoly, Athina Alimonos, and Sarah Soares, attended the Bolshoi Ballet Academy Summer Intensive in New York City this summer, Sarah and Emma Jane for three weeks, and Athina for six weeks. After her three weeks in NYC, Sarah spent six weeks in Moscow at the Bolshoi as part of the National Strategic Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) which is sponsored by the US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in collaboration with the Russian American Foundation and the Bolshoi. The following are edited excerpts of a conversation I had with the dancers.

### Were you well prepared for all the dancing you had to do?



AA: I felt I was prepared in the sense that I could do all the things they required us to do and I could do them well. We were a lot stronger than most of the dancers there.

EJK: The first week was really rough—we had so many weeks off after the spring show. But we got kicked right back into it after a couple of days.

SS: To get me mentally ready for it I thought of every day like a Saturday at MAB because that's where we really get the length. It was hard and my feet kind of

died for the first week—all my toenails were bruised.

### What was it like having your teachers speaking in Russian?



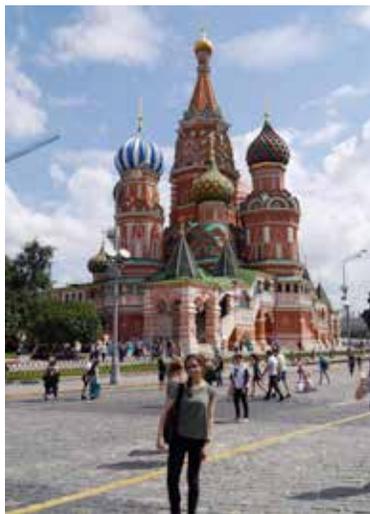
EJK: It was really overwhelming [at first]. But you get used to it and you learn to appreciate it and learn to appreciate the culture.

AA: The first week was hard. You had the translator but they were both talking at the same time! After a week you pick up key words, like first group, left, right, step back, etc., and you don't need the translator by the end.

SS: In Russia it was a little different because we didn't have a translator. They were really

good with showing things with their bodies or they would come over and put you where they wanted you. So it wasn't too much of a boundary. Not as much as you would expect.

### Sarah, what kind of language preparation did you have to do for Russia?



SS: In New York we had Russian classes twice a week after ballet was done. They taught us some ballet terms, the alphabet, the basics. Once we got to Moscow, it was 4 hours of language class every day. So that's when all the intense stuff started. By the end I could have basic conversations in Russian. I went to the Grishko store and I needed to buy legwarmers but they were behind the counter. I got all that done in Russian pretty smoothly, I could say my colors and the size I wanted, so I was pretty

proud! We could understand the ballet classes pretty easily, unless they got really metaphorical with their corrections—then it got a little shaky!

### What about the style of teaching? Contrast that with what you have at MAB?



EJK: They're just brutally honest about everything which is really good but it is also really stressful. And with the language it's kind of scary when they're yelling at you and you don't really know what they're saying! I think that really pushed me to take corrections super seriously.

AA: Before I came to MAB I had a Russian teacher who trained at the Vaganova. So I was used to that strict Russian training but I just hadn't had it in a while. You have to learn that

you can't take everything personally. They're only there because they want to help you get better.

### Do you think the experience helped you with your dancing?

SS: Definitely it helped with my dancing. Just really refining technique and improving my turnout and improving lines. Making it just look really nice. In Russia, the biggest correction they gave

us was “два плеча, два бедра” (2 shoulders 2 hips). It’s like when Rose and Charles say “keep the box”—everything has to move together. I thought about that a lot. I still do and it helps with everything.

AA: They definitely focused on technique. They really pay attention to every little in between step. They have an eye for detail for sure and that’s definitely helped us.

EJK: I learned to care a lot more about my technique and be really aware of it when I’m dancing. But also they made sure we weren’t so focused and tense—they wanted us to be dancing at the same time.

**What about the other dancers? What were they like?**

EJK: The first week everyone was definitely really tense. We all knew they were “scouting” us because they invite some people at the end [to train in Moscow]. Everyone wants to be the teacher’s favorite. But then I feel like we kind of bonded over that and we formed friendships off of the stress of ballet!

AA: I know the first week or two I was really closed off. Not in the sense that I was mean or anything. It was like “I’m here to dance.” That’s my main goal. And I kept that goal all six weeks. But you kind of open up. We would sit outside in the hallway in our dorm with the people around us and just talk. Talk and eat food and talk about the day.

SS: You find your little group of friends at these intensives. There are people who tend to be pretty competitive. But we had our group both in New York and Moscow of people that were just totally nice and supportive and positive. I still talk to my group from Moscow.



**Did the experience change you in ways other than dance?**

AA: I think I’ve become more mature because I’ve had to learn to be independent—you can’t just go home and play on your phone



and have your mom make you dinner and do your laundry. I wasn’t used to subways or trains. I had never been on anything like that before. But you get used to it after a week or two and you learn your way around. After 3 weeks, my parents were really shocked when I was taking them around the subway and knew which route to take!

EJK: Before the summer, I was so scared of the subway. I had a bad experience in the past so I was really terrified. But by the end I

was so confident with it. We were going to class on our own in the morning, several different stops. My parents were really impressed with how mature I was when I got back. Because you just learn how to take criticism, you learn to be independent, and you learn how to make reliable friends. It’s a lot of good skills to have.

SS: It changed my opinion about Russia and Russian culture and people. There are a lot of stereotypes that I didn’t know I had. [For example] that all Russians are very strict and they don’t show any emotion, like they don’t smile at you or talk to you on the street, but that was totally the opposite of what we saw. People would come up and talk to us and they were interested in what we did and what we had to say. Nobody ever was saying anything bad about us as Americans or anything like that. It was kind of nice to see.

**What was the most memorable thing about the experience?**

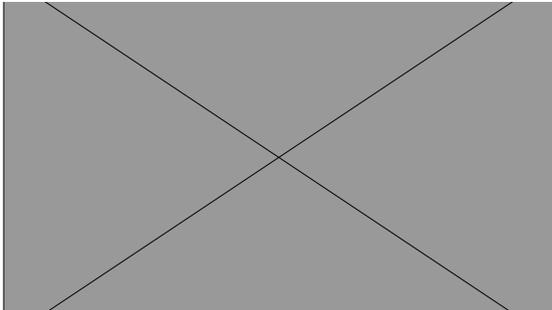
AA: I think the teachers. They had so much knowledge and were so informed about everything they were saying. One thing I will miss so much is the partnering. But the teacher, I thought he hated me the first three weeks. I’m pretty sure the whole class thought that too. Every single combination he would stop me. But the next three weeks I realized he wanted me to get better. It took me all the yelling to realize that!

EJK: That was my favorite class of the day, partnering. I learned so much. Little tricks that I never knew. It took us so long to get warmed up to [the teacher]. Then when we stopped taking it personally, everything just turned around. I loved all the cultural parts of the intensive—like the Russian language and the character class. Now I’m really curious about what Russia is like. It makes me really want to go.

SS: I think it was just being able to go to Russia. Because that was something I really never thought I would do. The Bolshoi Ballet Academy I always held as a dream and walking in there the first time—I couldn’t believe I was there. And being able to dance in the studios and sit in the hallway with the famous green carpet...



**Spring Concert  
2016**  
*Photos: Doug Brega*



# Hot Fun in the Summertime at MAB (and a few fall updates)

by Rose Flachs



*MAB Intern Nona Buonagurio teaches young dancers at the barre during MAB's summer sessions.*

Summer at the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet included a flurry of activity. From the open classes to the children's workshops and summer intensive.

Each day buzzed with excitement. Students took ballet and pointe classes, studied jazz and modern dance, participated in a sewing workshop with Arlene Kowal, and learned classical and contemporary repertory. Movement created in the repertory classes was the seed of inspiration for the complete ballet, *Juxtapose*, choreographed by Charles Flachs and recently performed at Mount Holyoke College. The final summer intensive showing was packed with friends and family. We were so proud of everyone.

Part of MABETA's mission is to educate the local community about the art form of ballet. Faculty member Crystal Menninga did just this when she directed a successful summer dance workshop at the South Hadley Public Library. Every Wednesday during the month of July, Crystal worked with local children teaching about how dance can be a means of expression. Each week had a different theme from *Dance and Athleticism*; *Fairies, Witches, and Warlocks*; to *Dance in Circus*; and *Rocking Rhythms*. By reading children's books, creating crafts and choreographing movement, students experienced the joy of dance. This project was made possible through funding from the South Hadley Cultural Council and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Nora Buonagurio, a dance major at Mount Holyoke College, was a summer intern at MAB. Part of this internship was teaching a dance workshop for Girls Inc. Twice a

week in July and August girls walked from Girls Inc. to our studios for a dance class expressing themselves through music and movement. This project was made possible through the LYNK program at Mount Holyoke College which supports student internships.

Charles and I attended the CORPS de Ballet International Conference and, I co-taught a Vaganova Teacher's Seminar with John White from the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet. The annual CORPS de Ballet International Conference in Sarasota, Florida focused on the pedagogy of the Cuban Ballet School and included lectures and classes from Ramona De Saá, the director of the National Ballet of Cuba's School. Miguel Cabrera, the historian from National Ballet of Cuba, chronicled the history of the Cuban Ballet. Ariel Serrano, director of the Sarasota Cuban Ballet School, described his experience training as a young boy in Cuba. Charles and I have an affinity for this method of training because of our teacher, Margarita De Saá, who is the twin sister of Ramona. The dedication of each teacher to challenge every student and instill a passion for dance is one of the major influences in our teaching.

Fall at MAB is busy with classes and rehearsals for eight shows of *Nutcracker* and *Sweets* December 16, 17 and 18 at the Wistariahurst Museum, an affordable and colorful local holiday tradition.

In closing, Charles and I continue our devotion to offering high-quality ballet training and inclusive artistic education for every student. We appreciate the time parents take to transport students to classes and rehearsals and are rewarded with the progress students achieve from their hard work and dedication.



## Learning to Teach

by Nona Buonagurio

During my internship, I had the excellent opportunity to work at Massachusetts Academy of Ballet with Rose and Charles. Their support and mentorship were essential in my realization for how much I love to teach; that I need to have teaching in my life.

At the Academy, I taught ballet for Level 1/2, twice a week for Level 3, and a Stretch & Conditioning class for Level 4/5. In addition to teaching, I took attendance, answered phone calls, and took inventory. I was involved in two community outreach programs, one with the South Hadley Public Library, sponsored by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and another with Girls Inc. Holyoke.

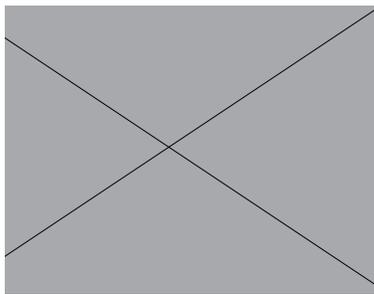
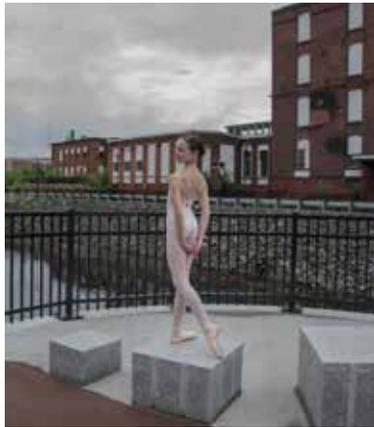
The program at the library met once a week and incorporated movement, crafts, and books. We had a different group of children for each workshop and covered topics from "Fairies, Witches, and Warlocks" to "Dance in the Circus." Creativity blossomed.

I designed dance workshops for girls ages 5-8 years old from Girls Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering young women through entrepreneurship, science and technology, and creative arts programs. The girls came to the dance studio and learned movement steps and phrases. We also played dance games which inherently explored the mind and body connection.

Next year, following my graduation from Mount Holyoke College, I plan to attend graduate school to become a certified dance therapist. My experience working at MAB solidified my desire to connect, grow, and help people through the art form of dance. Teaching is an art; you need to have patience and kindness with yourself as well as with your students. There were some challenging days, but those days guided me to discover how important teaching is to me. In teaching, I found fulfillment interacting with and forming meaningful relationships with dancers in the studio. I think my students may have taught me more than I taught them—to be confident, trust that you know what you are doing, and to love wholeheartedly the art form you are practicing.

# MAB Summer Intensive 2016

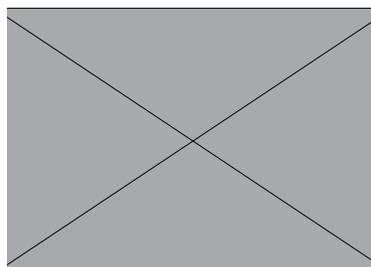
Photos: Charles Flachs



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*MAB dancers perform in the faculty concert at Mt. Holyoke College in October, dancing a piece choreographed by Charles*



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