

# En l'Air

News from  
MASSACHUSETTS  
ACADEMY of  
BALLET  
Educational Training  
Association

SPRING  
2015



Brenna Alyward is the picture of hard work and concentration as she warms up onstage before competing at Youth America Grand Prix in Boston. Photos: Charles Flachs

## Competition Successes for MAB Students

by Rose Flachs, MAB Co-Director

"Can you help with my tiara?" asked Athina Alimonos as she prepared to compete in the Youth American Grand Prix, Boston regionals.

"Let me touch up your make up," Rose Flachs said to Brenna Alyward before she stepped onto the stage at the Connecticut Classic Competition. It's all in the details!

This spring, after many, many months of rehearsal, two students, Brenna Alyward and Athina Alimonos, participated in the Youth American Grand Prix Regionals in Boston and the Connecticut Classic in Torrington CT. In Boston, Athina Alimonos placed in the top twelve of the junior classical division and was invited to the YAGP New York Finals.

At the Connecticut Classic Ballet Competition, Brenna placed 8th in the junior division and Athina won the bronze medal. Athina received a scholarship to the Hartt School Summer program, and Brenna received a certificate from Gaynor Minden.

Athina went on to New York in April, performing beautifully, taking master classes and meeting dancers from all over the world. "The best thing about competing is the process," said Athina. "The intense rehearsal schedule and attention to every detail make competing worthwhile."

"I enjoyed the master classes and variations class at the Connecticut Classic," said Brenna. "It was wonderful taking class with dancers

*Continued on page 5*

10TH ANNUAL  
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500 BEECH STREET GENERAL ADMISSION TICKETS \$15  
8 AND UNDER \$8 TICKET RESERVATIONS AT 413.536.6200  
AND WWW.MASSACADEMYOFBALLET.COM PROCEEDS  
BENEFIT MABETA AND HOLYOKE ARTS ENRICHMENT

 Massachusetts Academy of Ballet

## Spring Ballet Benefit Marks Decade of Dance

This year's Spring Ballet performance by the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet is momentous in that it marks the studio's 10 Year Anniversary. With passion, perseverance and partnership, Artistic Directors Rose and Charles Flachs have "raised the barre," transforming this Holyoke Ballet Academy into a highly regarded "destination" studio where students receive an artistic education in dance as well as community engagement.

On Saturday, May 31, Academy students celebrate the 10 year milestone with a 1pm "Spring Ballet" performance showcasing annual *Etudes* and excerpts from the

*Continued on page 5*

The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet

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



## PORT DE BRAS TO THE COMMUNITY

by Rose Flachs

**P**ort de bras in ballet means carriage of the arms, a movement that creates expressiveness in the whole body. MABETA takes port de bras one step further by creating connections, through dance, to partners in the local community.

This year MABETA and students of MAB danced in performances that raised money to benefit Providence Ministries, PassportHolyoke and the Wistariahurst Museum. MABETA also partnered with author David Rottenberg performing *Gwendolyn Goes Hollywood* for four, yes four, public schools! Mosier School in South Hadley, the Bowie School in Chicopee and the Lawrence and McMahon Schools in Holyoke. Earlier dancers made the book come alive at the Barnes and Noble in Holyoke with three performances. These events were generously supported in part by grants from the Holyoke and Chicopee Local Cultural Councils, agencies which are supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

### My Gwendolyn Day

by Nolan Saito



*When MAB dancers toured schools to perform Gwendolyn goes Hollywood, they worked hard and had a lot of fun too. Here's Level 3B student Nolan Saito's account of the day.*

5:45 Good morning!  
6:15 Start violin practice.  
8:00 Finish practice.  
8:10 I'm eating breakfast. It's enchiladas and potatoes that my dad made.  
8:15 I should probably start getting dressed now.  
8:25 Dressed and all ready to go.  
8:35 We're a little late but we're on the road.

9:10 We're here at the Lawrence School in Holyoke!

9:30 We're setting up props in the school gymnasium.

9:40 Showtime!!!!!!!!!!

10:25ish We finish the show and a Q&A session. We're heading back to MAB.

10:35 Lunch!

10:45 We're going into the big studio for a PARTAYYYYYY!!!!!!!!!!!!

12:45 After about 2 hours of dance partying we are going to school #2!

1:00 We're here at the McMahon school in Holyoke!

1:25 Setting up props.

1:30 Showtime #2!!!!!!!!!!

2:30ish We finish the show and Q&A, pick up some snacks, and we're headed to Abby's house for another PARTAYYYYYY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

4:25 We're leaving Abby's house to go to school #3!

4:30 We're here at the Mosier school in South Hadley, but it says on the schedule at the school that we're on an hour later than we thought we were. So, we're heading back to Abby's house!

5:25 Heading back to the Mosier school!

5:55 Setting up props.

6:00 Last Showtime!!!!!!!!!!!!

7:15ish We finish the last show and Q&A. We got pizza and lemonade at the school. I am looking forward to going home and taking a shower and going to bed.

9:55ish Goodnight!!!!



## Transitions

by Cathy Johnson, MAB Faculty

**M**erriam-Webster defines a transition as a passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another.

MAB defines a transition as the rite of passage that our dancers undertake as they leave our dancing family and make their individual and unique ways in the world. This year we will be saying bittersweet goodbyes to five of our MAB dancers as they make their own individual transitions. I had the opportunity to ask each of them—Anastasia Lusnia, Emlyn Fenwick-Homstead, Erica Maillet, Izzy Luu Li Haas and Molly Czitrom—to articulate their thoughts on their years spent at MAB as well as their hopes and dreams for beyond our studio walls.



**Cathy:** What are your immediate plans after leaving MAB? If you are heading to college, could you give me the college's name and what you plan on studying while there?

**Anastasia:** In the fall, I will be attending the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida to obtain a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing, and minor in Dance.

**Emlyn:** Immediately after MAB I will be attending Ithaca College in the fall of 2015 as an Art BFA major with a possible minor in philosophy/religion or women's studies. I also plan to continue taking dance classes in college, and probably for the rest of my life!

**Erica:** As I am writing this, I am in the midst of auditioning for ballet companies. Although it is scary to not be sure exactly where I'll be going next year, I can't wait to see where I end up, and begin my dance career! But in the meantime, I am thoroughly enjoying the audition process! Most of them take place in New

York, which is such an inspiring place to dance, especially knowing how many famous dancers have taken class, or maybe even auditioned like me, in the same studios. Unfortunately however, my quest to spot Misty Copeland is still ongoing (Cathy's post-interview note: I am happy to report that not only was Erica offered an apprenticeship with the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, she was accepted into Mystic Ballet!!)

**Izzy:** Immediately after high school in this coming fall, I will be attending the College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, majoring in Ballet Performance BFA. (Cathy's post-interview note: Izzy was awarded the Corbet Scholarship for Dance!)

**Molly:** Next fall I will be studying at Skidmore College in Saratoga, New York. I am going with an undecided major, however I'm interested in studying either English or sociology. In addition, I will be joining the dance department at Skidmore and I hope to either double major with

dance or minor in dance.

**Cathy:** What are your long-term hopes and goals?

**Anastasia:** After graduating from the College of Nursing at the University of South Florida, I plan to attend graduate school to become a nurse practitioner and ultimately specialize as a surgical nurse. Throughout my time in college, I aspire to grow as a dancer, and I look forward to expanding my current repertoire by studying modern dance as well. My goal is to be invited to participate in the Dance in Paris Program—a 4 week intensive study abroad opportunity in Paris. Ballet will always hold a special place in my heart, and I plan to continue to dance for the rest of my life.

**Emlyn:** My long term hopes and goals are to travel. I also plan on training to become a midwife after college or during my continuing education (I hope to earn at least a masters degree.) I also will continue my art throughout this time and I'll see where it takes me.

**Erica:** I've been auditioning for companies fairly close to home, but hope to join one with touring opportunities too, so that I can travel but still remain close enough to come visit the studio from time to time. I can't wait to come back and see all the progress everyone has made!

**Izzy:** I hope to become a professional ballet dancer in a smaller company. I hope to join Dance Theater of Harlem someday, or work with similar companies.

**Molly:** As for long term hopes and goals, I am thinking about going into a field involving therapy or rehabilitation, although that could easily change. I am also hoping to continue my dancing at Skidmore as well as specifically learning more about modern dance.

**Cathy:** Do you have a special memory from your time at MAB? Friendships? Special activities or performances you have enjoyed?

**Anastasia:** I am so thankful for all of the wonderful relationships I have with my teachers and my fellow dancers at MAB. It has been truly amazing to become close friends with people who all share the same passion. I have thoroughly enjoyed performing many times a year, however our annual performance of *The Nutcracker* will always be my favorite. I love that we are able to come together as a studio and dancers of all ages are able to rehearse together and all watch and learn from each other. Whether it be rehearsing in the studio or at the Wistariahurst Museum, we have always had our share of laughs and wonderful

Continued on page 4

experiences putting on a performance at such an amazing time of year.

**Emlyn:** I am so unbelievably grateful for my entire time at MAB. It's so hard to sift through the years of amazing memories and pick just a few, but the lifelong friends I have made is definitely one of them. The group of girls I dance with are like sisters to me. We have made so many incredible memories dancing on stage together, inventively surviving the heat during summer intensives, and bonding and giggling backstage during performances. I especially treasure the carpooling adventures to different shows, as well as *Nutcracker* at the Wistariahurst, feeling as if we had gone back in time living in a mansion for a weekend.

**Erica:** I have several favorite memories from my time at MAB. Some of these include listening to the *High School Musical* soundtrack in the Wistariahurst dressing room to get ourselves pumped to perform *The Nutcracker*, creating thousands of inside jokes that make us laugh endlessly, and also spending all day rehearsing together, only to go over someone's house afterwards to spend even more time together (special thanks to the parents, who didn't complain when we ate all the food in the fridge). It will definitely be sad not being able to see my best friends every single day, but I look forward to seeing where life takes us until we all come back in the future to take the adult classes.

**Izzy:** I have many great memories of MAB throughout the years. My closest friends have always been other students. In my freshman year, I practiced for YAGP with Liam Saito. This was the most focused I have ever been, but because I was training alongside my best friend, it was a task we were accomplishing together, allowing us to support each other during the time we were deciding to make ballet a career.

**Molly:** There are countless memories that I will take with me from MAB. One of my favorite memories is when level 5 pulled an April Fools prank on Charles by going into a backbend during barre. Another is when everyone in the studio was watching

Athina rehearse her variation and Rose had us all mimic her in order to make her smile more. I think another one of my favorite memories is performing the Arabian variation for *Nutcracker* this past year. The role was so much fun to dance and I was also forced to learn how to act the role of the character. The friendships I have made with the other students at MAB are eternally engraved on my heart. I am inspired, day in and day out, by how hard each and every one of the students at MAB work. I am truly grateful to be able to study with Rose and Charles as well. They are incredible, in every aspect of the word, and they have taught me about dance as well as about myself. I have learned a great deal from them and they are two people whom I will always remember and cherish for everything they have given me.

**Cathy:** Could you briefly talk about what your time at MAB has meant to you over the years?

**Anastasia:** The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet has become a second home for me, in just a matter of a few years. Each day I look forward to going to the studio, and working hard to grow as a dancer and as an artist. Rose and Charles have provided me with so much guidance and support, and have taught me an extraordinary amount while challenging me to reach my greatest potential. MAB is truly an incredible place to grow as a dancer and as a person, and I will forever be grateful for this.

**Emlyn:** MAB has been a family for me, and it has given me an irreplaceable creative outlet. I have not only learned to be a dedicated ballet dancer, but the discipline and core ideals of ballet have benefited me in all parts of my life. It has provided amazing structure, and I am so grateful to Rose and Charles and everyone at MAB for giving me so many opportunities and for supporting me all of these years. I am so thankful.

**Erica:** I could fill up the entire newsletter with everything MAB has meant to me over the years. The amount of growth I have experienced as a dancer and as a person is astounding. Rose and Charles are definitely two of the most influential people in my life. They have not only helped me gain the ballet technique, but also the confidence to pursue my dreams and I cannot thank them enough for that. Also, the girls of Level 5

have formed a special bond over the years and each of you have big things ahead of you. Thank you for your support, laughter, pep talks, advice, and most of all your wonderful friendship. Working at the desk this year has given me the opportunity to really get to know the students and parents and has made me realize what a wonderful family we all are. I hope to be able to find a company with the same closeness and supportive atmosphere as MAB. I am inspired every day by the enthusiasm and dedication of the students at MAB and I know I will never forget my time here.

**Izzy:** Spending all these years at MAB has really meant everything to me. I used to never stick with anything for long, but being here has really made me want to focus on one thing and keep improving. Even if I didn't decide to take ballet to the professional level, being at MAB has taught me discipline in a supportive way. MAB has provided a space that I look forward to work in because I'm in the same boat as all my friends.

**Molly:** I began at MAB when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and I remember thinking that I would never be able to dance how the other girls were dancing in Level 5. But working with Rose and Charles has taught me that discipline and a good work ethic can take you places you never thought you'd be able to reach. MAB holds a very special place in my heart. MAB has given me both motivation and confidence and has taught me the true meaning of hard work paying off. I will always remember the people I've met at MAB. The girls in Level 5, especially, share an extremely close bond, and we have become somewhat of a small family rather than a dance studio. On our hard days, we help each other push through and on our good days we are cheering each other on. I truly cannot imagine my life without all of the people I have met at MAB. I am eternally grateful for everyone who has inspired me through dance at MAB and everything that Rose and Charles have taught me about dance. Dance itself has become a part of who I am.

*Cathy: All of us at MAB send these lovely young women into the world with much pride and best wishes for what are surely bright and promising futures. Dr. Seuss said it best... "Oh, the places you'll go!"*

from other schools."


Both students were fantastic ambassadors for MAB. They performed like professionals in variations from *Raymonda*, *Don Quixote*, *Fairy Doll* and *Fille Mal Gardée*. Charles Flachs choreographed contemporary solos for each dancer.

"We are so proud that our students danced beautifully with strength and artistry. Each made a great deal of progress and improved immensely during this process," said Charles Flachs. Congratulations Athina and Brenna!!!



## 10TH ANNUAL SPRING BALLET

SUNDAY MAY 31ST STUDENT PERFORMANCE AT 1 PM  
SILENT AUCTION AT 12 NOON HOLYOKE HIGH SCHOOL  
500 BEECH STREET GENERAL ADMISSION TICKETS \$15  
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classical ballet *La Bayadere*, with choreography by Matisse Madden, Charles Flachs and Debra Vega. There will also be Tap by Tapella, directed by Crystal Menninga and Corinne Morgan, and guest artist performances by alumna Connie Flachs and Yuka Oba, courtesy of the Grand Rapids Ballet Company.

The Spring Ballet performance takes place at Holyoke High School (500 Beech Street, Holyoke). The 1pm performance will be preceded by a Silent Auction at 12 noon at this same location, featuring a selection of gift certificates to local businesses, tickets to events, and handmade artisanal items. There will be a reception immediately following the performance. General admission tickets for adults are \$15 and children 8 and under \$8. Tickets can be purchased at the MAB studio (4 Open Square Way, #403, Holyoke) or at the door on the day of the event (Holyoke High School, 500 Beech Street, Holyoke). Proceeds from ticket sales and the Silent Auction benefit MABETA (Massachusetts Academy of Ballet Educational Training Association), the non-profit organization whose mission is to educate the surrounding communities about the art of classical ballet through performance and lecture demonstrations.

For more information about the MAB "Spring Ballet," call 413-536-6200 or visit [massacademyofballet.com](http://massacademyofballet.com).

**PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS,  
BROTHERS, SISTERS, AUNTS,  
UNCLES, COUSINS & FRIENDS...**

**Send your dancer a  
special greeting in our  
Spring Ballet program  
book!**

Fill out an order form at the desk in the studio or call 413-572-5536. Make checks payable to MABETA.

All proceeds benefit MABETA's scholarship and community outreach programs.

**Scenes from Nutcracker & Sweets at Wistariahurst, December 2014**





Photos: Charles Flachs and Michael Epaul



Left page counterclockwise from top left: Level 3B/4 dancers, Level 5 dancers, Level 2 dancers, Merleton, mice, Catherine and Matisse, Rose and Izzy, Level 5 dancers. Right page counterclockwise from top left: Arlene and Rose; Cathy, Evan and a photobombing Sugar Plum Fairy; mice, soldiers, and bonbons; Wistaria flowers; Parsons paper dolls; Russian dancers; and silk dolls



*MAB dancers answer audience questions at the Mosier School in South Hadley, at the end of an all-day, 3-school tour of Gwendolyn Goes Hollywood, choreographed by Charles Flachs, accompanied by picture book author David Rottenberg. Photo: Loran Saito*



*MAB students Nolan Saito, Lila Norton, and May Saito and alumnus Evan Saito performed a Mozart string quartet as part of MAB's Dance to Stop Hunger, a fundraiser for Kate's Soup Kitchen, on April 11th. Photo: Charles Flachs*



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