

## Local dancers compete

By Carrie Seidman , Herald-Tribune / Wednesday, March 2, 2016

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Fourteen-year-old Harold Mendez, a student from Cuba studying at the Sarasota Cuban Ballet School. / SOHO Images

The Cuban native knows whereof he speaks. His own son, Francisco, earned a scholarship to London's Royal Ballet School after advancing to the YAGP New York finals in 2014. Having just completed two years at the school, Francisco Serrano was recently accepted into the Royal's main company, where he will begin his professional career this fall.

Students from the Sarasota Cuban Ballet School were awarded top prizes recently at the Denver regional finals of the Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP), the world's largest ballet scholarship competition, and the Universal Ballet Competition (UBC) in Miramar, Florida.

Harold Mendez, a 14-year-old student from Cuba, won the Grand Prix in the Youth Division at the YAGP Denver event. Doing so earns him a place in the YAGP international finals in New York City in April.

At the UBC competition, also in mid-February, Sophie Miklosovic and Michael Mengdeon won first place Senior Division in the pas de deux category. Miklosovic also placed second in the Classical division and third in Contemporary. Another SCBS student, Lucy Hamilton was ranked within the top seven in the women's senior Classical division.

Ariel Serrano, founder of the SCBS with his wife Wilman Hernandez -- both are former professional dancers -- was named Outstanding Teacher at the YAGP event.

"It is greatly important for students who are working to become professional ballet dancers to participate in these competitions because it is an opportunity for them to be seen by representatives from the best ballet companies in the world who are searching for young talent," Serrano said.



Sophie Miklosovic and Michael Mengden of the Sarasota Cuban Ballet School, earned a top award at the Universal Ballet Competition in Miramar for their pas de deux. / SOHO Images