

# DANCE<sup>®</sup> magazine

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CONVENTION GUIDE**  
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# Rules of the Game

How to get more than just a medal out of competitions

BY CANDICE THOMPSON

**By itself, a trophy** won't really prepare you for professional life. More valuable than placing at competitions is the exposure you can get and the connections you can make while you're there. But how can you take advantage of the opportunity?

**1. Get Noticed in Class.** At a competition, taking class isn't only about improving your skills—it's also about showing them off. Take it from Broadway dancer and New York City Dance Alliance faculty member Jared Grimes: "So you won? Oh, cool, congrats. But a medal, to me, doesn't matter at all if you're a sinking ship in my class. When I leave a judging table I sometimes have no clue who won. But I remember memorable dancers—usually from their work in class."

Even in crowded rooms, make sure you're seen. "If a company director is teaching class, don't be shy," says Larissa Saveliev, co-founder and artistic director of Youth America Grand Prix. "If you know the combination well, be in front, go twice. They will pay attention."

**2. Say "Thank You."** Always thank the teacher after a class. "Be confident and polite," says Rhythm Dance Center co-director Becca Moore. "Making eye contact and being sincere go a long way." Plus, taking the moment to say a simple "thank you" during a break can also be an opportunity for a longer conversation if you sense the teacher has time. "You can ask a couple questions after class, or if you feel like you got good corrections and attention, you might say, 'I enjoyed your class a lot. Should I audition for you?'" says Saveliev.

**3. Respect the Hierarchy.** When there is so much star power in the room, excitement can quickly turn to offense. If you don't see a natural opening but want



YAGP 2015  
Youth Grand  
Prix winner  
Shin-Yong Kim

to connect with a faculty member or director, talk to your home teacher first. "You shouldn't come across as pushy or desperate," says Moore. "Come to us studio directors for advice on connecting rather than personally reaching out to convention teachers. This just shows respect." Plus, their recommendation might help you get the response you're looking for!

**4. Make Friends.** Don't only set your eyes on networking with directors—your peers are resources, too. "You never know, you might end up in the same company or gala, or need to borrow a costume or ask for some advice," says Saveliev. Moore agrees. "Building positive relationships with peers can lead to future jobs, and vital support systems—you will have an instant friend when you move to L.A. or take a gig on a cruise ship."

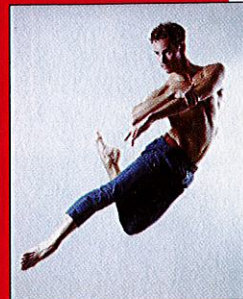
**5. Follow Up.** If you make a connection, stay in touch, says Saveliev. "That shows commitment and discipline." In advance of an audition, you might send an email with a link to your reel or mail a video with a letter, reminding a director that you met previously at a competition. Don't overdo it or expect a response, but a polite, concise note can't hurt.

**6. Let Rejections Go.** "Dance is a subjective art form," Saveliev says. "The goal should not be to please everybody, but just to find that one person, program or company that you are a good match with." If a connection doesn't go the way you want, use any constructive criticism for growth, stay positive—and move on.

## Insight from the Pros

**RYAN STEELE, Broadway performer:**

"I didn't realize that I wasn't just competing for a scholarship or a title, I was auditioning for future jobs. Some of my strongest professional relationships were built at conventions and competitions. Not just with the teachers, but with peers as well. Those relationships will stick with you. Make them count!"



**LIA CIRIO, Boston Ballet principal dancer:**

"Don't compare yourself to your fellow dancers. Focus on you and the goal you wish to accomplish."

**JACLYN WALSH, Keigwin + Company dancer:**

"Onstage, there are so many other variables aside from bodies in space: the lighting, spike marks and live music. The experience I built while competing made me more prepared to tackle these as a professional."



## Winning Isn't Everything

A medal is not a shortcut to a future job, and sometimes it is not even a plus. "Some directors are afraid that a kid who wins a lot of medals will come to their company with too many expectations," says Youth America Grand Prix artistic director Larissa Saveliev. "Directors want to mold young dancers to fit their company, so students should remember working hard and getting exposure are the most important things at competitions."