



Youth Compete In Ballet 'Grand Prix' (Photos)

Youth America Grand Prix offers a chance to win scholarships and professional jobs



Above: Makayla O'Sullivan and Kassie Coon of Murrieta's Academy of Ballet Arts prepare backstage for their classical variation. Academy of Ballet Arts was awarded the Outstanding School Award.

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By [Nina Garin](#)

Ballet dancers aren't seen as fierce competitors, but over the weekend hundreds participated in something similar to the Olympics, or "American Idol."

Specifically, they competed in the [Youth America Grand Prix](#), one of the largest international ballet competitions in the world. Top dancers from San Diego and other regional semi-finals move on to compete in New York, where they can win scholarships and even jobs in professional ballet companies.

The dancers who participated at the California Center for the Arts, Escondido ranged between ages 9 to 19. Many performed two classical ballet variations and one contemporary piece. Some also competed in-group dances.

Here's a backstage look at dancers ages 15 and older getting ready to go on stage for their classical routines.



Rachel Donaldson of Orange County's Dmitri Kulev Classical Ballet Academy poses for photos after performing two variations.



Melanie Ziment of California Ballet gets some last-minute tips from coach Clarissa Palhegyi before performing a variation from "Le Corsaire."



Before competing, dancers do everything from take phone calls to receive last-minute tips from their coaches.



California Professional Ballet Program's Gena Nelson before performing her variation from "Swan Lake" at the Youth America Grand Prix competition. Nelson placed in the top 12.



In this 2017 photo, Ali Fisher of San Diego's California Professional Ballet Program prepares to dance the Fairy Variation from "The Sleeping Beauty."



Dancers from California Professional Ballet Program. Their group danced placed in the top 12 and the dancers have been invited to perform at the YAGP finals in New York.