

## Michigan Ballet Academy dancers win first, second place at World Ballet Art Competition-Grand Prix Semifinal

*Written by Steven Sucato for [cultured.GR](http://cultured.GR).*



Corinne Jarvis in Nikoloz Makhateli's "Song for Viola."

*Photo courtesy of Michigan Ballet Academy.*

No one would have blamed Nikoloz Makhateli if he had said no a third time to Michigan Ballet Academy (MBA) board president David Bellamy's offer to take over the artistic leadership of the academy. Makhateli was a principal dancer with the National Opera and Ballet Theater of Tbilisi in Georgia and a master ballet teacher for the national ballet schools of Nicaragua and Senegal, his own Makhateli Ballet in Colorado, and the Kirov Ballet Academy in Washington, DC. He had retired from teaching to live in his native Georgia after a decades-long career of training ballet students worldwide, several of which went on to professional dance careers including Makhateli's own children, David, a former principal dancer with England's Royal Ballet and Maia, a principal dancer with Dutch National Ballet.

But Makhateli says the political tensions in Georgia over Russia along with his positive experience in visiting Grand Rapids to teach master classes convinced him to take finally accept the post 2014.

"It's a beautiful place, quiet—and the students love ballet," says Makhateli. Two of MBA students now benefitting from Makhateli's un-retirement and teaching expertise are 16-year-olds Corinne Jarvis and Breanna Proseus. Both dancers competed in and took top honors in the Toronto semifinal of the World Ballet Art Competition - Grand Prix this past October. In the classical category of the international competition for 14 to 16-year-olds, Proseus placed first for her performances of a variation from George Balanchine's ballet Walpurgisnacht (1975) and the "Kitri" variation from the ballet Don Quixote (1869). Jarvis was awarded second place in the same category for her interpretations of the "Pas D'Esclave" from Le Corsaire (1858) and a solo from the ballet Raymonda (1898). She also placed third in her age group in the contemporary category for her performance of Makhateli's contemporary ballet solo Song for Viola (2014), with music by folk-pop Americana singer-songwriter Peter Bradley Adams.

Both dancers came to the dance academy, housed in Cascade, a suburb of Grand Rapids, in 2011 from the Grand Rapids Ballet School, following former Grand Rapids Ballet principal dancers and MBA founders Akop and Gaiane Akopian. MBA's mission according to their website is to "deliver the highest quality ballet training in an atmosphere of creativity, challenge, encouragement, and integrity." Under Makhateli's mentorship as well as the tutelage of other MBA faculty members including former Cleveland San Jose Ballet standout Joanne Jaglowski and Grand Rapids Ballet star Yuka Oba, Jarvis feels MBA is living up to that mission.

"I wanted to train more seriously and have more performance opportunities," says Jarvis of her move to MBA.

But Jarvis' current push for ballet excellence began as a push against her family's calling. Both of her parents were professional ballet dancers in Mexico and the U.S., and her brother Victor is a dancer with the new Cleveland Ballet. She was put in ballet classes at an early age.

"I absolutely hated it. I would throw tantrums when I had to go to class," she confesses. Jarvis says she quit for a time but went back to it and really fell in love with the art form after performing in Grand Rapids Ballet's "The Nutcracker" production.

In contrast, Proseus, the youngest of four (her and three brothers), is the only one in her family that dances. Her ballet training began at age 6 after she became interested in dance from watching a ballet video.

Both Jarvis and Proseus began entering ballet competitions such as the prestigious Youth America Grand Prix even before Makhateli took over the school and say they enjoy and find value and personal growth in competing.

Makhateli sees ballet competitions as an important learning tool and for gaging how one is progressing as a dancer.

"You can see who you are," he says. "Where you are [in your training] and what you need to improve on."

While the learning aspects of competing may be the overriding motivation for MBA's dancers to compete, doing well or winning isn't bad either says Makhateli.

"I get a lot from seeing the other dancer's variations and what details they put into them and what their coaching is like," says Proseus.

"It is amazing to see the other dancers in the competition and their level of training," says Jarvis. "You get to meet dancers from all over the country and sometimes from other countries. The master classes offered are phenomenal and you get a taste of what it is like to be a professional dancer and perform outside of your community."



Breanna Proseus in the Kitri variation from the ballet "Don Quixote."

*Photo courtesy of Michigan Ballet Academy.*

When it came to choosing what they would perform at the World Ballet Art Competition - Grand Prix, the two ladies took different approaches. Proseus chose from the competition's approved list of repertory, the variation from the ballet "Don Quixote" and deferred to Makhateli's choice of Balanchine's "Walpurgisnacht," both of which play to her strengths as a dancer which she says are her jumps, turns, and expression onstage.

Jarvis chose from the list 10 or so variations, learned them all and performed them in front of others for feedback ultimately choosing as one, the variation from "Raymonda."

"Mr. Makhateli was a little skeptical of one of my choice of 'Raymonda' because it was challenging," says Jarvis. "But we decided it was going to be a really good thing for me. It has helped me improve in a lot of areas in my dancing I was weaker on."

Both dancers will compete in this weekend's World Ballet Art Competition - Grand Prix finals at the Scotiabank Convention Centre in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada performing the same repertory on November 12. The pair, along with qualifiers from the competition's four other semifinals, will vie for top three medals as well as cash prizes and scholarships in several age groups.

Both Jarvis and Proseus say they will stick with their pre-performance routines at the finals. Jarvis likes to eat a piece of her favorite food, chocolate, and listen to music that calms her and then pumps her up before she takes the stage. She will also have along with her a lucky sweatshirt her brother gave her when she was younger.

"I really don't get nervous, I get excited," says Proseus. "I focus on all the corrections Mr. Makhateli has given me during our rehearsals." Proseus says like other athletes, she goes over what she is about to do in her head while listening to the music for each solo.



On the heels of the World Ballet Art Competition - Grand Prix finals, local audiences will have a chance to see both dancers in action as they alternate the lead role of the Sugar Plum Fairy in Michigan Ballet Academy's production of Makhateli's "The Nutcracker" on December 2-4 at the Jenison Center for the Arts.

For Jarvis and Proseus, their ultimate goal in competing and training is have a professional career in ballet. Soon both will be auditioning for jobs and trainee positions at ballet companies. Proseus says her dream job would be to join The Royal Ballet or Seattle's Pacific Northwest Ballet. Jarvis says she doesn't really have a single dream company she would like to join, but is interested in a ballet company that does both full-length ballet classics and contemporary dance works.

Suffice it to say, both dancers seem to be on track at MBA toward making their dancing dreams a reality.



Michigan Ballet Academy dancers Breanna Proseus (Left) and Corinne Jarvis show off first and second place certificates respectively from the World Ballet Art Competition -- Grand Prix semifinal in Toronto.

*Bruce Jarvis*