

The Border Mail

First Australasian Ballet Challenge on the Border

By Ellen Ebsary

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The “Pavarotti of ballet” and dancers from New Zealand and beyond will be on the Border this weekend for the Australasian Ballet Challenge, the first event of its kind.

Wodonga ballet teacher Jennifer Podesta seized on the opportunity for dancers to work with Italian prima ballerina Mara Galeazzi, creating an event to coincide with her trip to Falls Creek.

“It was really just an idea, we knew Mara was coming up for the the dance camp and gala, so we thought we’d make the most of having her here,” she said.

“Dancers always have to travel a lot to participate in competitions at this level, so we were keen to bring some of the city folk to Wodonga.

“We don’t have one like this in Australia, so it’s really the first of it’s kind in terms of a stand alone competition.

“With the camp and gala up at Falls Creek, we’re certainly looking for this to become an annual event.”

Mrs Podesta said 60 entrants would compete across the weekend.

“We’ve got people from Sydney, Canberra, there’s someone coming from New Zealand, so for the first year it’s very exciting,” she said.

“After Saturday’s preliminary rounds, a group would be selected for the finals on Sunday afternoon.

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“There are three ages groups, a sub-junior, junior and senior, and there’s a \$5000 prize pool.

“There are also masterclasses over the weekend.”

Amia Mason, 15, said the weekend will be one of her last opportunities to practice before competing at the Youth America Grand Prix.

She was one of only 600 dancers invited to the event from 90,000 applicants.

“I’m really taking this competition to use it as an opportunity to get in the right mind-frame and prepare for this competition in New York,” she said.

“I’m most looking forward to getting to work with some amazing dancers, and also just showing everyone me and my dancing.”

“They have so much experience and knowledge from their journey, so I’m really looking forward to it.”

Ms Mason said she was grateful to have access to world-class mentoring.

“Living in a small town, there aren’t many competitions so this is a really big opportunity, having them come to us,” she said.



FUTURE STARS: Amia Mason, 15, and Meg Newton, 11, from Regional Academy of Dance will compete in Youth America Grand Prix. Picture: ELENOR TEDENBORG