

## All eyes on Durfee sophomore dancing his way to scholarships



As rising star dancer David Grannum headed to the Youth America Grand Prix finals in Boston, he thought it might be his "last hurrah" performance before refocusing his attention to thoughts of college and career. Turned out, it was a life-changing moment for the B.M.C. Durfee High School sophomore. YAGP is an audition in which dancers from around the country — and the world — perform before a panel of esteemed judges hoping to attain a scholarship to a dance school or program.

At the finals in Boston on Friday, March 18, Grannum performed the contemporary piece he worked out a few weeks before with On Stage Academy of Performing Arts dance teacher Lindsey Fernandes. The following day, it was time for his ballet variation, Santanella. He started rehearsing that one at the end of December with On Stage ballet master and choreographer Eivar Martinez. "I wasn't expecting anything to come from it," said Grannum, 16,

who only started taking ballet lessons at age 12 at On Stage Academy of Performing Arts. "Some of the dancers there have trained in New York, and some of them have been dancing since they were three years old."

After his ballet performance, he was retrieved from backstage and told the judges wanted to talk to him. When he went before the panel of judges, one of them asked him: "What do you want? Where do you want to go? And how can we help you?" recalled Grannum, adding, "She really caught me off guard." The judge also told him, "There's so many places you can go. If you want to go, I can make it happen," he said.

For the young dancer, it was like someone telling him he got a free ride to the Ivy League. He was offered a full scholarship to the professional program of his choice including the Miami City Ballet School, the Boston Ballet School and The Ailey School. He also placed third in his division at the YGAP finals for his contemporary dance and in the Top 12 for the ballet performance from among hundreds of performers.

As of last week, Grannum said he was considering (and waiting to hear more about) a full scholarship to a Summer Ballet Intensive at the internationally renowned Rock School in Pennsylvania to fine-tune his ballet skills. From there, he's considering New York: The Ailey

School, the official school of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater where he would also finish up his last two years of high school. Grannum, whose single mother, Natalie Grannum is raising three kids on her own, said he told the judge the only way he could go to any school would be if it was full scholarship, boarding included.

After getting the offer, Grannum said he sought advice from Linda Mercer-Botelho, owner/teacher at On Stage. She reiterated his mom's advice: "Make sure it's what you want," said Grannum. And it seems he has a lot of choices open to him. Grannum's also tied for the rank of third in his class at Durfee, where he takes Advanced Placement Language and Composition, pre-calculus, and honors chemistry, history and Spanish.

When contacted this week about the extraordinary dancer, Mercer-Botelho described Grannum as a dedicated and committed student who's willing to put in all the hard work. "He really is a great student and so thankful for any help in leading him to his goals," she said. "He has always had the passion and the talent. Getting the right people to see him perform in the right setting was the most important part of his future." In addition to the private training two days a week to prepare for the YGAP finals, Grannum takes dance classes Mondays to Fridays. Mondays and Saturdays are at On Stage where he studies various forms of dance. From Tuesday to Friday, he takes ballet lessons at Festival Ballet in Providence. As for his mom, she said, "I support him in whatever he wants to do — whatever, he's comfortable with. I'm very proud of him."

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