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Blacksburg dancer, 12, wins gold medal at Grand Prix Finals

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Photo courtesy of Heidi Mesmer

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Lindy Mesmer has been dancing since she was 3 years old. This Radford University Ballet Youth student is now 12 and the Gold Medal winner of the Youth America Grand Prix international ballet competition held in April in New York City.

Youth America Grand Prix is considered the world's largest student ballet scholarship competition for dancers of all nationalities between the ages of 9 and 19. Each year, over \$250,000 worldwide leading dance school scholarships are awarded to winners. Since its inception 15 years ago, over 25,000 dancers have participated in its workshops, competitions and audition

classes.

Mesmer studies with Aleksey Plekhanov, principal faculty of RU's youth ballet program, RUBY, and adjunct professor of dance at RU. He has coached and prepared her for the Youth America Grand Prix competition. Together they have worked on her classical variation from the ballet "Paquita" since mid-January. She also presented a contemporary piece entitled "The Calling," choreographed by Kyle Shukis.

This has meant practicing extensively six days per week.

Mesmer qualified for the Youth America Grand Prix final competition in February when she performed at the regional round in Atlanta.

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During the finals in New York, she vied against 120 ballet students representing 25 countries. She was the only American to place in the top three in her age group.

"This achievement demonstrates a very high caliber of ballet training offered by Radford University and its Ballet Youth program," said Inessa Plekhanova, RU associate professor and artistic director of RUBY.

Plekhanova's students have participated in this competition several times in the past. Some of them won Bronze, Silver, Gold medals, as well as the Grand Prix award. Among them is Isabella Boylston, currently the principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre. Boylston won a Gold Medal in junior category in the finals in 2001. Also, Plekhanova was awarded the prestigious "Outstanding Teacher Award" at the Youth America Grand Prix in 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Aleksey Plekhanov states, "Lindy is talented, very dedicated and a hardworking dancer. She has studied with Radford University Ballet Youth under my instruction for two years. Inessa and I look forward to continue working with Lindy to help her to develop her potential and skills further."

Heidi Mesmer, mother of the Gold Medalist, discusses the adjudication, "Her performances were judged by representatives from international ballet schools and companies including the Paris Opera Ballet, American Ballet Theater, the National Ballet of Canada, and the Australian Ballet School. She was also offered a summer scholarship to attend the Rock School in Philadelphia."

Submitted by Leslie King