

First Position: Where Are They Now?

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Five years ago, a little dance documentary took the ballet world by storm. *First Position*, former dancer Bess Kargman's film that followed several top dancers competing at Youth America Grand Prix, took a slew of awards at film festivals. Not only did it give viewers an unprecedented look at the pressure-filled world of ballet competitions, it also made stars of the talents it followed. This year's New York City finals, April 22–29, are fast approaching. (By the way, YAGP will be streaming all the live action online.) So it got me thinking: What happened to those kiddos—now adults—that Kargman introduced us to years ago?

Aran Bell

The first young dancer we met in the documentary was Aran Bell, an 11-year-old American studying in Rome. Bell loved BB guns and ballet, and had a pretty great sense of humor. And oh yeah, he was incredibly talented, with a natural ability to turn like a top. Today, Bell dances in American Ballet Theatre's Studio Company. He's certainly a little taller than he was during the *First Position* days, but he can still turn.



Rebecca Houseknecht

Rebecca Houseknecht's story felt the most conventional of those *First Position*. She lived at home, went to a traditional high school, she even tried cheerleading. At Maryland Youth Ballet though, where she trained, she wasn't your average dancer. Houseknecht had beautiful lines, and a natural ease to her dancing. Unfortunately, at the end of the film, we find out she didn't place at the YAGP finals. But she was offered an invite to audition privately at Washington Ballet, and was hired to dance in the Studio Company. According to a *Washington Post* story from 2012, Houseknecht spent a year dancing professionally, and then quit. She denied a contract from Sebtime Webre to join the main company. "I didn't like having to dance for my job, as weird as it sounds," she said. "You think it was my dream, but it just didn't work." Houseknecht went on to study speech pathology at Towson University, and joined its national title-winning competitive dance team. And after taking a peek at her Twitter, it looks like she's still involved in the dance, as a ballet teacher at Maryland Performing Arts Center.

Joan Sebastian Zamora

Joan Sebastian Zamora was a 16-year-old grown up. He was living in New York City during filming, away from his parents in his native Colombia. Zamora had squeaky-clean technique for a young dancer. At the end of *First Position*, we learned that he was given a scholarship to study at the Royal Ballet School.

After graduating from there, Zamora joined the English National Ballet, where he danced for two seasons. He left in 2015 to come back Stateside and join The Joffrey Ballet in Chicago.



Miko Fogarty

Californian Miko Fogarty was sort of what you would expect of a serious ballet-dancer-to-be. She left traditional schooling to do homeschooling so that she could spend more hours during the day dancing, and her mom was a stereotypically obsessive dance mom. But all those sacrifices paid off. Fogarty's dancing had a maturity well beyond her 12 years. Since the film, Fogarty went on to win tons of medals, including gold at the 2013 Moscow International Ballet Competition, silver and bronze at Varna, and a Prix de Lausanne Award. She has gained a crazy social media following. Her Instagram has more than 280,000 followers. She now dances with the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Michaela DePrince

The gifted Michaela DePrince had a crazy-inspiring story. Born in Sierra Leone, her parents were shot by rebels. With no one to take care of her, DePrince was put in an orphanage. She was eventually adopted by Americans Elaine and Charles DePrince, who enrolled her at The Rock School in Philadelphia. DePrince had an incredible balance of flexibility and strength, and was clearly going to go far. De Prince eventually left Philly to study at ABT's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School. She spent one year at Dance Theatre of Harlem before moving to the Dutch National Ballet as an apprentice. Since then, she's taken on several principal roles at the company. And just this month, DePrince was promoted to grand sujet for the 2016–17 season.

