

4 Questions for YAGP's Larissa Saveliev

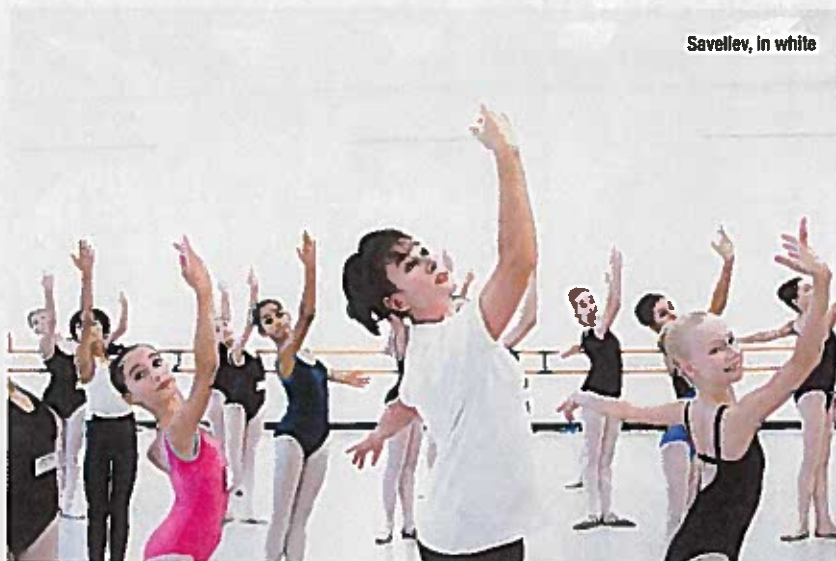
From April 10 to 15, more than 1,000 teenage ballerina and danseur hopefuls from all over the world will travel to New York City to compete in the 17th annual Youth America Grand Prix finals. By week's end, many will leave with contracts or scholarships for further study from top-tier companies, like American Ballet Theatre, Paris Opéra Ballet and San Francisco Ballet. *DT* spoke with YAGP co-founder and former Bolshoi ballerina **Larissa Saveliev** about what it's like to run the high-profile event that has awarded \$3 million in scholarships since its inception in 1998.

What do you think have been some of the most memorable performances?

"My number one for sure would be Sarah Lane [now a soloist with American Ballet Theatre]. It was years ago, but that was really a breakthrough. I think Cesar Corrales from Mexico [now with the English National Ballet] was spectacular last year. He's certainly somebody to watch. Gisele Bethea [who won the Youth Grand Prix at 13], she's the young protégé. Everybody has different stories—sometimes they stand out right away, sometimes it comes later. For me, most important is not what they did today, but what are they going to do tomorrow?"

Which variations are perennial favorites for competitors to perform?

"It changes every year! If someone did very well the year before, everybody tries to do that variation. A funny story: Years ago, when we had just started competing in Japan—where they have more ballet



Saveliev, in white

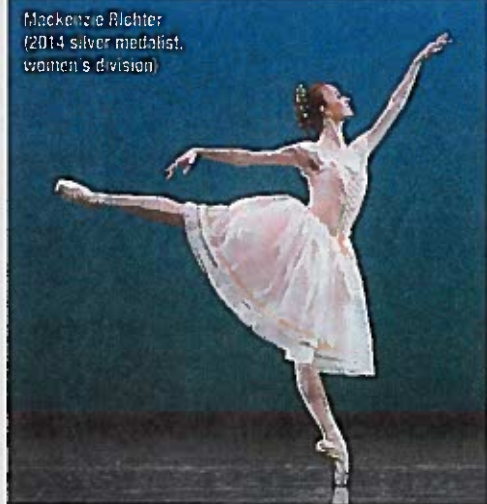
competitions than anywhere else on the planet—everybody kind of did the same rep. And when the Japanese dancers came to New York, Ami Watanabe did [Marius Petipa's] *Harlequinade* and got a scholarship to Stuttgart. The next year, half of Japan was doing *Harlequinade*."

What do you look forward to most during finals week in NYC?

"Scholarships. That's why we exist in the first place. I really call us matchmakers, because sometimes a child really wants to go to a particular place, but that place is not interested in this particular child—but another place is. When it clicks—when the school is happy and the child is happy—that's where the most rewards are."

What's the most stressful part of the week for you?

"Sometimes I feel like a juggler. It's the kids, it's the jury, it's the parents and the teachers, it's the gala and the guest artists. And something always happens: Somebody's flight gets delayed, somebody gets injured. We've had a fire in a theater, snowstorms, ice storms, power outages—name it, we've been through it."



Mackenzie Richter (2014 silver medalist, women's division)



Left: Cesar Corrales (2014 Grand Prix winner); below: Juliet Doherty (2014 gold medalist, women).

