

CUTLINE:

Top achieving ballerinas with Colorado's Classical Youth Ballet including Julianna Bicki, 16, Angela Wood 15, Erika Yeager, 15, Hillary MacPhee, 14, Audra Ball, 14, Sarah Kovach, 16 and Kim Dorland, 18.

Ballet Society and its Colorado's Classical Youth Ballet
producing outstanding results for exceptional young dancers

By David Vickers

Careers are in the making.

Patricia Hoffman, founder of the Ballet Society of Colorado Springs says she is certain that some of the young girls who are now achieving acclaim locally and regionally will very soon find themselves in the national spotlight among ballerinas. She has results from the past year to give her confidence. No fewer than seven members of Colorado's Classical Youth Ballet, a performing company formed in 2003, have earned prestigious awards, vaulting them into studios across the nation where only the finest ballet students are accepted for training.

Juliana Bicki, a 16-year-old Lewis-Palmer High School student who joined CCYB two years ago, earned the Esther Geoffrey Dance Scholarship and the Denver Ballet Guild Scholarship this year, and parlayed that into a six-week summer intensive training session at Walnut Hill in Massachusetts on a full scholarship. In ballet circles, that's about as good as it gets.

Angela Wood, 15, from Colorado Springs Christian School, also earned an Esther Geoffrey Dance Theater Scholarship this year, plus a Denver Ballet Guild Scholarship both last year and this year. Her latest accomplishment was gaining admission to attend a three-week summer intensive workshop at Ballet Austin (Texas).

Erika Yeager, 15, Hillary MacPhee, 15, Audra Ball, 14, Sarah Kovach, 16, and Kim Dorland, 18, each earned an Esther Geoffrey Dance Theater Scholarship or a Denver Ballet Guild Scholarship. Each of these girls has been awarded with a variety of performances or scholarships, ranging from Dorland's attending Brigham Young University as a dance major, to earning a spot in the Ballet Society's summer session or starring in ballets like "Cinderella" (with MacPhee, Kovach, Yeager, Wood, Dicki and Dorland) or Ball's performance in Sunrise Church's presentation of "Godspell." All of the girls hail from North Springs and Monument, except for Dorland, who has traveled here from Pueblo for the past two years to train with the Colorado Classical Youth Ballet.

"Five of the girls have been with us since age 9," said Hoffman, whose artistic director is Holly Marble. "They are an outstanding bunch of performers."

“All of them came in with an eager desire to learn ballet,” Hoffman recalled. “They started their training coming to our studio two times a week at ages 9 or 10, then by the time they were 16 or 17, it was five to six times a week and 15 to 20 hours a week of training.

“And they are all outstanding students in their schools. Angela Wood earned the top character award at CSCS last year, for example,” Hoffman noted.

The training is necessary because the performance schedule for Colorado's Classical Youth Ballet is rigorous. Last season, the girls were involved in 13 productions, collaborating with groups from across the region.

This year, for the 2007-2008 season, the ballerinas have a chance to tour China with the Colorado Springs Youth Symphony next May and June, when they would perform in five cities. Also, in March they will have a chance to perform at Pikes Peak Center in the Dr. Seuss production of “Many Colored Day,” directed by Maestro Thomas Wilson, dancing to the poem that illustrates how children feel through the many colors of life around them.

Then, on Dec. 15-16, they will perform at Rampart High School in “A Nutcracker Ballet and Holliday Tea” with the Colorado Conservatory and David Sckolnik performing the part of Tchaichovsky, who narrates the “Nutcracker.”

“It will be the fourth year in a row that we've performed the 'Nutcracker' with a holiday tea,” Hoffman said. “But this will be the first time the 'Nutcracker' has been fully narrated. We will give four performances.”

Typically the performance involves about 40 dancers age 10 to 18.

Ballet takes perseverance, both by the dancers and their families, Hoffman said.

“These girls are remarkable women. They have remarkable families behind them. I think we will definitely see fruition of their work and they will have wonderful careers,” she said.

Other ballet professionals from around the country agree.

“This is one of three pre-professional training centers in the United States that is producing dancers ready for professional training and careers,” said Many-Jayne Richardson, ballet mistress at National Ballet of Canada. “Patty and Holly not only are providing their dancers with the right physical tools, but are also imparting the spirit and work ethic that dancers need in the competitive world of ballet.”

The Ballet Society of Colorado Springs evolved from humble beginnings. In the fall of 1997, Hoffman enrolled 26 students at the Community Center in Black Forest with just one instructor. Today, the Ballet Society operates out of a facility in North Springs with 7,200 square feet of space (at 4005 Le Vance View) dedicated to ballet and enrollment is approaching 400 with a faculty of 12.

Six years ago, Hoffman and Marble, who is originally from Colorado Springs but had been working for a decade as the principal ballerina with the Nevada Ballet Theater, decided to join forces and inaugurate the Colorado Classical Youth Ballet.

They have succeeded in bringing teachers here from across the nation for four-week intensive training sessions periodically, including for the past four years, representatives like Richardson from National Ballet of Canada.

The next move, Hoffman said, is to complete her efforts to obtain 501c(3), or nonprofit status, for Colorado Classical Youth Ballet, in part because it works with so many other performing arts organizations in the region.

“We have performed with virtually all of the leading performing arts organizations in the Pikes Peak region – even as our own presentations routinely sell out,” she noted.

“Through all of this, though, we have endeavored to remain true to the principals that we set forth from the beginning: to create a learning environment where the focus would always be on a balance of dance, health and excellence.”