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November 2017

The Coastal Star



On their toes



Budding ballerinas team up with pros to stage 'Cinderella'

By Janis Fontaine

Tiny dancers pool around Ekaterina Shchelkanova's perfect feet like a dozen ducklings, their bright eyes glued to the lithe woman with the translucent skin and graceful posture.

They know they are in the presence of greatness, and Shchelkanova easily commands the room, her Russian-accented English as smooth as her plié.

A troupe of 80 South Florida dancers ages 7 to 13 auditioned for and won parts in the Open World Dance Foundation's production of *Cinderella*, on stage at the Parker Playhouse on Nov. 25 and 26.

The group features more than a dozen boys and girls from Palm Beach County who will dance on a big stage with professional dancers from the American Ballet Theatre. It is a huge honor and a thrilling accomplishment for these budding ballerinas.

One of the smallest dancers is Jolie Lavaux, 7, from Boca Raton. She has been dancing since she was 3. She's gregarious and outspoken, her big personality belying her petite size.

Jolie naturally finds her way to front and center of the action during a rehearsal at Organic Movements in Boca Raton. Tiny but not timid,

TOP: Jolie Lavaux (front, with pink flower) of Boca Raton leads the dance troupe during rehearsal for *Cinderella* at Organic Movements in Boca Raton. ABOVE: Cephane Amelia Sanchez Cole of Delray Beach practices her poses during rehearsal. The play is scheduled for Nov. 25-26 at Parker Playhouse. Photos by Tim Stepien/The Coastal Star

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BALLET

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she leads a line of dancers dressed as flowers across the stage on tiptoes. The slight smile on her fine-featured face draws your eye like a magnet.

The auditions were open to all girls and boys, regardless of prior dance training or experience. One of Open World's missions is to find talented young dancers and provide opportunities for them to reach their full potential. This includes bringing ballet programs to orphanages in Russia as well as opening auditions to non-dancers.

Shchelkanova founded Open World with her partner, Anton Boytsov, in 2010. Both were born in St. Petersburg, Russia, and met as students at the Vaganova Ballet Academy.

Founded in 1783 as the Imperial Theatre School, the first Russian school of theatrical dance, it is still considered one of the best in the world. Of the thousands of students who audition each year, about 350 are chosen for the intense program. In 1957, the school was renamed for Agrippina Vaganova, a graduate and professional dancer who became one of ballet's most revered and accomplished teachers.

The school's graduates are a who's who of ballet: George Balanchine, Natalia Makarova, Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov, who is also one of Open World's supporters.

This will be the second time Open World has staged Prokofiev's ballet with student performers. Last year, Misty Copeland danced the lead in



Instructor Ekaterina Shchelkanova founded the Open World Dance Foundation to find and provide opportunities for young dancers. **Tim Stepien/The Coastal Star**

the foundation's production in Houston, which brought more than 130 kids to the stage.

Cinderella is a classic role that most ballerinas long to dance, and it's a role Shchelkanova knows well. She sings the score as she demonstrates the steps, and at 47, she's as strong and limber as any student.

Her precision and grace are mesmerizing, and those skills earned her top roles in ballets around the world and even took her to the big screen in the Academy Award-winning film *Chicago*.

Shchelkanova (credited as Ekaterina Chchelkanova) danced alongside Renee Zellweger and Catherine Zeta-Jones as the tragic, wrongly convicted Hunyak in the *Cell*

Block Tango number.

Mikhaila Whiteman, 21, of Long Island, is Shchelkanova and Boytsov's personal assistant and a gifted dancer. After studying at Vaganova, Whiteman danced the leads in both *The Nutcracker* and *Sleeping Beauty* at St. Petersburg's famed Hermitage Theatre. She's the oldest of the handful of students chosen to train with and represent Open World, and she helps fine-tune the girls' performance.

It's a bit like herding kittens, but some of them, like Cephane Amelia Sanchez Cole, 10, of Delray Beach, are more easily coached than others. Tall and flexible, she hangs on Shchelkanova's every word, and her attention to detail earned her a spot out front.

Cephane goes to Plumosa School of the Arts; between school and private lessons, she dances six or seven days a week. She likes ballet, jazz and art.

"I would love to be a professional dancer, but I also really like art because I get to be both proper in ballet and messy in art," she says.

Many of the dancers say they're drawn to dance because of the music, and they love the combination of athleticism and artistry required to master ballet. Their mothers say dance builds strength — physical, mental and emotional — maturity and character.

"Learning steps," Shchelkanova tells them, "is not the same as dancing. Everyone must pay attention. Everyone must count. We have amazing

If You Go

What: *Cinderella*

When: 7:30 p.m. Nov. 25 and 2 p.m. Nov. 26

Where: Parker Playhouse at the Broward Performing Arts Center, 707 NE Eighth St., Fort Lauderdale.

Tickets: \$35-\$175 at www.browardcenter.org

Info: www.OpenWorldDanceFoundation.com

dancers coming and we have to be ready."

Ballet is a work of minutiae. A minor change in the placement of the foot is like the difference between matte and gloss in painting. Turning the knee out even an inch can turn a dancer from mediocre to magnificent.

Jolie's mother, Cheryl Lavaux, says she knows her daughter is learning more than dance steps: "Self-respect, discipline, problem-solving and perseverance, in addition to balance, coordination, strength and flexibility."

To Jolie, it's much simpler: "I like pointing my toes and stretching."

Dancers from Palm Beach County include Angelina Aramouni (12), Jolie Lavaux (7), Chloe Rivet (13) and Brianna Salcedo (10), all of Boca Raton; Aaron Gomez (8) and Yacob Gomez (9), of Boynton Beach; Ana Baraldi (7), Cephane Amelia Sanchez Cole (10), Alyssa Jin (9), Sophia A. Triminio (7), Mikayla L. Wieland (10) and Zariah Valentine (11), of Delray Beach; Savonya Haliburton (12), of Riviera Beach, and Jayla Jacobs (7), of West Palm Beach. ★

Boca Raton

Boca Artists Guild returns to city

By Lucy Lazarony

The Artists Guild of the Boca Raton Museum is moving to a new gallery at 2910 N. Federal Highway in Boca Raton. Part of Elegance Plaza, the new gallery is 3,000 square feet and almost double the size of its former home on Atlantic Avenue in Delray Beach, where the gallery was based for the past nine years.

The gallery's grand opening is set for 6 p.m. Nov. 15, with a ribbon cutting by the Boca Raton Chamber of Commerce at 6:30.

Plans for the gallery, on the east side of Federal Highway and less than 2 miles from the Boca Raton Museum of Art, include workshops, art demonstrations and lectures as well as opening receptions for Artists Guild exhibitions.

"This larger, light-filled space has inspired both the artists and art lovers with renewed enthusiasm," says Jody Grass, chair of the board of trustees of the Boca Raton Museum of Art. "We are thrilled to have this opportunity to support and strengthen our local arts community with a new facility."

The new gallery will be open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and on Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m.

Regular openings for new exhibitions, which are always free and open to the

public, will be announced via www.bocaguild.org. A portion of the proceeds from the Artists Guild Gallery art sales supports the Boca Raton Museum of Art.

"In addition to creating a new, updated space for local artists to share their work, this move brings the Artists Guild closer to our organization's other two campuses — the museum at 501 Plaza Real and the Art School at 801 W. Palmetto Park Road," says Irvin Lippman, executive director of Boca Raton Museum of Art.

Rent was not a factor in the decision to move, said Kelsey Johnson, who handles public relations for the Boca Raton Museum of Art.

"The lease in Delray was up at the end of October and another larger space (3,000 square feet vs. 1,700 square feet) was available in Boca Raton (nearer the museum) at a comparable rate."

Founded in 1950, the Boca Raton Museum Artists Guild has long provided an association for artists to share their work.

Today, the membership-based group is an auxiliary of the museum and organizes more than 20 juried exhibitions of artworks created by guild members throughout the year, in various locations.

Membership details are available at www.bocaguild.org/index.php/join or by calling 278-7877. ★

Along the Coast

Literary Coalition's annual reading campaign underway

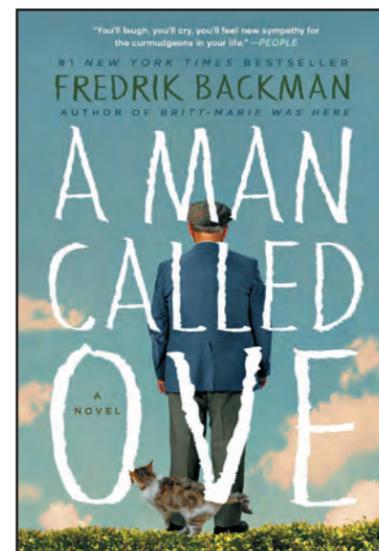
Time to pull out the reading glasses. The Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County's ninth annual "one book, one community" reading campaign is underway and runs through early December.

The aim of the campaign, called "Read Together Palm Beach County," is to get adults to read the same book at the same time and to discuss the book.

The program entices those who like to read, but don't do it often, to get reading again.

This year's book is Fredrik Backman's *A Man Called Ove* (pronounced Oh-Veh), a story of unexpected friendships and a reminder that life is sweeter when shared.

The Literacy Coalition and Read Together are hosting more than 30 events at various venues, including libraries, restaurants, theaters and museums. For details, see www.literacyabc.org/event/



read-together-2017.

The book can be purchased for \$10 at The Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County, 3651 Quantum Blvd., Boynton Beach, and at Starbucks stores.

— Staff report