

## They're Called Intensives For a Reason



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Macy Sullivan is attending the Mark Morris summer program.

By REBECCA MILZOFF

**F**OR 15-year-old Mikayla Lambert this summer hasn't been what most girls her age would consider awesome. Instead of sleeping late, she wakes up each morning at 8:30. While her friends might spend their days outside relaxing by a pool, she stays inside for hours. She has a curfew.

But this is her choice. As a student at the School of American Ballet's summer intensive, she's one of hundreds of young dancers who aspire to professional careers and who invade New York each summer for the myriad programs offered by dance companies large and small. You've seen them on the subway with braces and buns. You've seen them in giggling packs stretching in Central Park. They come from all over the country for sessions running one to six weeks, and they

refer to these programs as intensives for a reason. Most students are in classes, like technique or repertory or choreography, until dinnertime, and many also take it upon themselves to stretch or work out before bed. Think of it as sleep-away camp for the preternaturally directed set. (Like the poised Ms. Lambert the students tend to exude maturity beyond their years.)

And their motivation is clear. Every day at a summer intensive the possibility of being invited to stay once the summer's over looms, and the parent companies often view the classes as extended auditions for their schools and troupes.

"I'm the age when most people start to go out" for professional auditions, Ms. Lambert, a tall, soft-spoken brunette from Dushore, Pa., said on a recent day at School of American Ballet's stu-



dios at Lincoln Center. "The first few weeks I was really nervous all the time, because I really wanted to get asked to stay. But I got asked to stay." She will enter the school as a full-time student this fall.

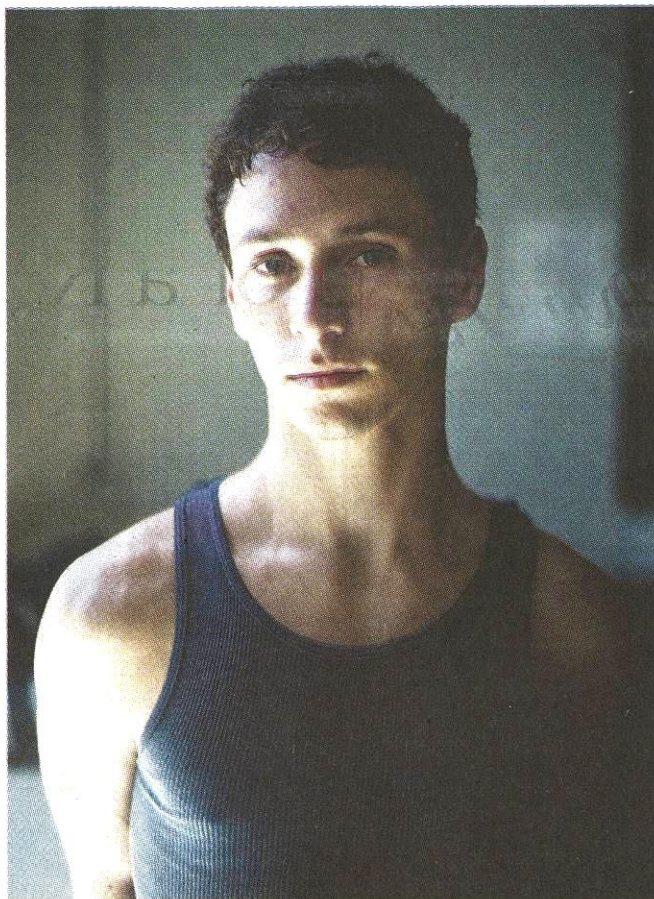
The audition in disguise isn't confined to the ballet world. Macy Sullivan, 22, a rising senior at Juilliard, first took interest in the Mark Morris Dance Group as a freshman, after seeing Mr. Morris's "Gloria" in the conservatory's annual concert. "But I didn't want to go when I was younger," she said of the summer intensive. "I still had a lot to learn in school. I knew now would be a good time to start letting them see me."

Potential students for these intensives usually have to apply each year; auditions are held in cities around the country. The students are about 12 to 18 for ballet programs, while modern-dance students skew slightly older. Admission can be competitive and expensive. Intensives at School of American Ballet, American Ballet Theater and the Ailey School cost \$2,300 to \$2,800, before room and board, though many companies offer scholarships. Even without one, dancers and their families are willing to pay.

"As much as it hurts, the money you have to spend, that goes toward your career," Ms. Sullivan said. "I'm spending it because I want to improve myself and hopefully in the long run it's all worth it."

Teachers acknowledge the programs' importance as feeders into their companies. At New York City Ballet 74 of the 94 dancers on the roster attended the School of American Ballet intensive; 45 of 92 at American Ballet Theater went through the company's program. But the instructors say the goal of the intensive is writ larger.

Tracy Inman, co-director of the Ailey School, said that while "quite a few want to be in Ailey II or Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, there are those who just want to get the training and don't want to run all over the city to do it." The Ailey intensive aims "to make the dancers so strong and



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Kay Mazzo, the faculty co-chairman at the School of American Ballet, said that while "summer is huge" for aspiring City Ballet dancers, the intensive more importantly "broadens their horizons, expectations, everything." She added: "You come from your little school and think, 'Oh boy, I'm pretty good.' And then you come here and see everybody else and think, 'Oh boy, I've got a lot to learn.' And that's so important."

Patrick Corbin, who oversees the Paul Taylor Dance Company's intensive, said, "They come away with a new sense of what they can put their body through."

"They're learning critical thinking," he said, "how to pick up choreography, spatial relationships, how to work with other people. They're teaching their brains to work more quickly, and I think they go away with a real sense of confidence."

A big part of that confidence comes from the specialized attention students receive. At 19, John Harnage of Miami is attending

his first Paul Taylor intensive. "I didn't have Taylor before this, but I found very quickly I like it," he said. "It just kind of fits with my body. My teacher, on the second day alone, nailed me on a huge correction, something I'd been working on for a while that I was trying to figure out myself. But she just saw it instantly. It's awesome to get that kind of attention. It makes you a better dancer."

Lindsay Poulis, an animated 23-year-old from Lewisburg, Pa., dances in Graham II, Martha Graham's second company, but she still waxes ecstatic about the company's summer intensive, which she's attending for the fourth time, in large part because "so many of the faculty worked with Martha, it's amazing," she said.

For many intensive students the summer is also a time to try out life in the city on their own, with some provisions. At the School of American Ballet dorms (where most of the students are housed) parents designate whether their children may venture outside the school's neighborhood when socializing; students fill out cards every time they go out, denoting who they're with, when they expect to return and what kind of transportation they're using. Ailey students also mostly live in dorms, while at Taylor and Ballet Theater, students find their own apartments. Lily Wisdom, a 16-year-old from the Boston area who is at Ballet Theater's intensive, is living with two other girls; their mothers switch off playing house mom.

Like many of her ballet colleagues Ms. Wisdom is eloquent and demure when discussing her classes, but she quickly turns into a teenager when it comes to discussing her social plans: "I love this restaurant in Chinatown, Joe's Shanghai? You've probably heard of it. It's ahmazing. And Times Square, obviously I go shopping there a lot."

She was especially looking forward to catching a midnight showing of the final Harry Potter movie, she said, though she planned to nap beforehand. She did, after all, have class the next morning.