



The Children's Ballet of San Antonio
Artistic Director & Founder Vanessa Bessler

In Less than 10 Years, The Dance Center of San Antonio Ranks in the Top 5% of American Ballet Institutions

Dance Center of San Antonio ranks #23 in the US, while its associated pre-professional company, The Children's Ballet of San Antonio, continues to capture the international spotlight.

San Antonio, TX — (March 6, 2024) Even science is catching on to what many local dance students and their families have known for years: the Dance Center of San Antonio and its associated Children's Ballet of San Antonio offer a top-tier entrance to the world of professional dance. This unique model combines the rigorous instruction of the Center with the unparalleled performance opportunities of The Children's Ballet, giving young students a pre-professional path among the most elite dance institutions in the world. Earlier this year, an international team of data scientists analyzed just such institutions to determine which did best in competition and subsequent professional development, in other words, they ranked the most prestigious dance schools in the United States.* Not only did the Dance Center of San Antonio place 23 on the list, it was the only one from San Antonio and the surrounding metro area, and one of only two Texas-based institutions in the top 25. This places the Center firmly in the top 2.5 percent of American ballet schools. Not a bad way to mark the upcoming 10th anniversaries of both the Dance Center of San Antonio and The Children's Ballet of San Antonio.

The study, titled "[Quantifying hierarchy and prestige in US ballet academies as social predictors of career success](#)" analyzed two decades of data from the Youth America Grand Prix, a highly influential annual competition for students ages 9 - 19, to determine the dynamics that link ballet school social prestige to a dancer's chance of career success. The findings suggest that the social prestige of a school facilitates the professional development and job placement of its students and reveal a compelling correlation: the odds of securing a coveted contract increase by 65% for students graduating from the top 5% of ballet schools.

The students of the Dance Center of San Antonio have excelled at the Youth America Grand Prix since the Center's earliest days. Over the past eight years, its students have racked up nearly 50 awards at YAGP events and consistently placed in the top 12 of all dancers competing in their category, including taking the top award, the Youth America Grand Prix Chicago, in 2018. Of course, none of these successes would be possible without founder Vanessa Bessler, herself a nine-time consecutive winner of YAGP's Teacher of the Year award.

Recently inducted into the 2023 San Antonio Women's Hall of Fame, this former Prima Ballerina has worked tirelessly to open the world of dance to local children of all ages, races, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds, bolstering San Antonio's reputation on the international performing arts stage while inspiring the next generation of dancers to reach for their dreams. At the age of 18, Bessler joined the National Ballet of Panama as a Prima Ballerina. Shortly after, she was soloing and just a year later she was performing in principal roles, eventually becoming the youngest ballerina in the company to earn a principal dancer contract at age 21. She was also the first dancer from Panama to receive a full scholarship to the world-renowned Joffrey Ballet School. Trained and certified in the Vaganova, Cecchetti, and Royal Academy of Dancing

methods, Bessler established the Dance Center of San Antonio ballet school and CBSA in 2015 to pass on her dance expertise and passion.

The Center goes far beyond typical dance studio offerings, augmenting their afternoon and evening classes with an academic day school for the most serious aspiring dancers. Day school students receive accelerated academics in a small classroom setting while being able to devote several hours a day to their dance education and attend special opportunities without worrying about falling behind in their studies. But even those not on track to become a professional ballet dancer find much to love about the Dance Center of San Antonio, which offers classes in a range of styles to students of all ages. "In addition to our exceptional full time faculty, our team includes internationally renowned Guest Ballet masters and choreographers who provide extensive coaching that prepares them for professional performance opportunities," says Bessler. Two of the most recent masters and staff members to join the team are Aliaksandra Sasha Krukava and Nurlan Kinerbayev, Vaganova trained-teachers from Belarus and Kazakhstan respectively, who perform alongside many of their students in CBSA productions.

In addition to earning extensive awards at the Youth America Grand Prix, dancers affiliated with the Center and CBSA have many other impressive accolades including invitations to perform in prestigious international competitions like the Prix de Lausanne, the International Ballet Competition, and Russia's Vaganova Prix. "CBSA taught me discipline, work ethic, and mental toughness," says Lucy Hassman, a CBSA alumna and current CBSA II Trainee. Under Bessler's tutelage, students like Hassman have won scholarships and trainee positions at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy, the Houston Ballet, the English National Ballet, the Royal Ballet of London, Canada National Ballet School, Princess Grace Academy in Monaco, the San Francisco Ballet School, and the Dutch National Ballet School among many others. Hassman alone racked up an impressive 35 scholarships in six countries and was the youngest Texan selected for the International Ballet Competition, known as "the Olympics of Ballet," all before the age of 18.

"Being in the pre-professional program at CBSA and attending summer intensives with guest artists prepared me to be a well-rounded dancer," says Arabelle Alvarado, 16, who took first place in the YAGP ballet competition three consecutive years in a row and currently studies at the San Francisco Ballet School. Rachel Marsh, whose son Joaquin is a current DCSA and CBSA member, says the company has encouraged his passion for dance. "With the support of all his instructors he continues to develop this craft," says Marsh. "His training and dedication have helped him grow mentally and emotionally as he prepares for competitions and performances. He sets high standards and continues to strive towards them with the help of everyone behind this amazing program."

Now, the new generation of baby ballerinas born around the same time as the Dance Center and Children's Ballet were founded are setting a new barre, already accumulating the highest recognitions in the region for their age level. Inez Dunne, 11, has trained with Bessler in the pre-professional program at DCSA for five years, placing at YAGP's regional competition the first year she was eligible to enter. Since then, she has continued to awe judges, becoming the youngest person in the world to be invited to perform a solo at the YAGP finals in 2022, placing first in classical and second in contemporary at the most recent YAGP regionals in Houston, and receiving a second place award from the International Ballet Competition regionals, and first place in classical ballet and third place in contemporary at Celebrity San Marcos.

Just last month, another rising star DCSA student, Alexandra Riley, 10, received the highest scores of all dancers at the Celebrity Dance Competition in Dallas. She won first place awards in ballet and contemporary and most impressively, placed first overall and for best technique across the entire competition.

"We never dreamed our very timid four year-old, who cried through her first Nutcracker audition, would bloom under the stage lights," says Jenna Natho, mother of student Gigi. "For the past eight years her technique has grown right along with her love for the stage, and we are so thankful for the performance opportunities CBSA continues to provide."

For a school and company that has not yet celebrated their 10th anniversary, the Dance Center of San Antonio and CBSA have quickly caught up to the world's top dance institutions, as evidenced by the multiple awards and bright futures of so many of their young dancers, not to mention the new evidence-based ranking. CBSA has come a long way since its first production, for which about 30 children auditioned. Their latest production auditioned more than 200 aspiring performers, says Bessler.

About The Dance Center of San Antonio:

Founded by nine-time Youth America Grand Prix Outstanding Teacher award winner Vanessa Bessler, The Dance Center of San Antonio is dedicated to offering premium training in all dance disciplines. The prestigious faculty includes internationally renowned teachers with inspiring professional careers and unparalleled pedagogical dance education. The curriculum focuses on developing the whole person: confidence, responsibility, and artistry, through training of the highest quality. By strengthening our dancers' skills in those areas, Center staff prepare them for experiences on and off the stage.

The acclaimed year-round, full-day training program is designed to meet the needs of dedicated students ages 10-19 who are preparing for a professional career or post-secondary dance training. DCSA also offers a variety of classes in all styles, private instruction, choreography, and training for dancers ranging in age from 18 months to adults. Professional performance opportunities are available through partnership with CBSA.

About the Children's Ballet of San Antonio

The award-winning Children's Ballet of San Antonio (CBSA) is an authentic, professional-level ballet company that produces professionally staged productions showcasing San Antonio's most talented children. Dancers are selected by invitation or audition. The Children's Ballet of San Antonio is a nonprofit organization 501(c)3. For more information, visit childrensballetofsanantonio.org or call 210-462-7660.

Mission: The Children's Ballet of San Antonio (CBSA) seeks to inspire the pursuit of excellence and prepare children for productive and creative lives through dance by offering extensive training and performance opportunities for talented children from all backgrounds.

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