

National College of Dance ballet pair reach Prix de Lausanne

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Belle Beasley

March 16, 2019

whats-on,

IN September 2018 when two young Newcastle dancers first applied for the Prix de Lausanne, one of the biggest ballet competitions in the world, they had absolutely no expectations. The chances of their work even being considered by the internationally-recognised jury members was extremely low. For the dancers, the whole process of auditioning was simply seen as a learning experience. However, thanks to their relentless hard work and dedication, Grace Humphries, 16, and Chloe Reynolds, 18, were accepted to be competitors in the Prix de Lausanne, in Lausanne, Switzerland, held in February. The Prix de Lausanne is regarded as one of the most prestigious competitions for ballet in the world. As well as providing a platform for students to compete, it is also a chance to be seen by influential directors, teachers and choreographers from around the world. It is more than just a week of intensive competition - it is a chance for ballet students to access a professional network, and secure professional training and employment offers. Humphries and Reynolds began their applications in September, sending through their health documents to prove that they could withstand the physical stresses of competition. The next step was creating a film reel of their work in ballet technique, ballet repertoire and contemporary movement that would be sent to Switzerland. The film reels are viewed by nine jury members. From there, the field of 500-plus applicants is cut to finalists. "I still can't believe I was accepted to be part of such a prestigious competition," Humphries says, recalling her state of shock upon learning of her acceptance. Despite Australia's good reputation for producing talented dancers, it is extremely rare to have two dancers from the same school acknowledged by such a large European institution. Both of the girls attend the National College of Dance in Lambton, directed by renown dancer and director Brett Morgan. "The teachers at NCD have been so supportive in helping us prepare and apply for the competition. It was such a long process and would have been incredibly difficult to do on our own," Reynolds says. Humphries, recalling some of the stressful moments of the rehearsal period, says: "In fact, all of our peers were so caring as well, always encouraging us to stay positive and keep working hard even when we were so exhausted." After their acceptance on November 1 the girls worked tirelessly through December and January, fine-tuning their technique and performance skills, taking only a few days off over Christmas and the New Year. For ballerinas on a mission to make an international impression, down time is redundant. It was important to be as perfectly rehearsed for the competition as possible, as the jury members would be watching the dancers throughout the week of training prior to the solo performances on stage in February. This is another element of the competition that makes it special; while many competitions are structured to judge only the one- to five-minute solo shown on stage, the Lausanne considers the importance of artistic process, and judges the dancers during a week of work. The competition holds seven days of classes and rehearsals taught by top-

flight ballerinas and coaches, which in itself is a priceless experience for the young dancers travelling across the world. It levels the playing field by considering worth ethic, attention to corrections, adaptability to new movements and ability to sustain energy over an entire week of training - all important skills in the career of a ballet dancer. The classes are viewed by the panel and by directors scouting for talent. Although stressful, the classes were a highlight of the experience for both of the Newcastle girls. "I still can't believe I had the chance to meet such amazing people and be coached by my idols," Humphries says. "I have never learned so much and been so inspired in just one week." The girls are still waiting to hear where the results of the competition will take them next, but it is sure to be the first step in an exciting career.

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World stage: Newcastle ballet dancers Chloe Reynolds and Grace Humphries.

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Special experience: Grace Humphries and Chloe Reynolds at the Prix de Lausanne.

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