

Aspiring ballerina poised to train in Russia this summer

By Jennifer Kohlhepp Staff Writer



Millstone's Isabella Cerri, 15, (r) performs at the Princeton Ballet School in Cranbury. MILLSTONE — Isabella Cerri floats like a spirit on the stage. The ballerina tries to make each performance seem effortless to draw audiences into another world. Mastering this poised style of dance requires much practice. Isabella, 15, started dancing as a young child and currently trains under the instruction of Mary

Barton, Douglas Martin and Maria Youskevitch at the Princeton Ballet School.

While other girls her age enjoy the time off from school relaxing, Isabella will spend her summer vacation training more intensely. She will cultivate her talents in New York City as a chosen participant in the three-week Bolshoi Ballet Academy Summer Intensive. "I auditioned for the Bolshoi in Lincoln Center," Isabella said. "Being accepted made me really happy."

"They were offering 16 students the opportunity to study language, culture and dance in Moscow," Isabella said. "The application process was really long and required letters of recommendation, two essays and an interview." In April, Isabella learned of her acceptance into the program. She will travel to Moscow, where she will spend six weeks studying the Russian language, culture and ballet at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy. RAF Vice President Rina Kirshner said the foundation and the academy value cultural exchange. As part of the second group ever to receive NSLI-Y dance-related scholarships, RAF considers Isabella an ambassador of the program that they hope continues for years to come, Kirshner said. "Five years ago, RAF established a summer program in the U.S. in partnership with Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet Academy and has been bringing the academy's master teachers to train American students ever since," Kirshner said.

RAF petitioned the United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs through a grant opportunity provided by the American Councils for International Education to become a part of the NSLI-Y program, Kirshner said. "We thought this would be a priceless opportunity for our students to really get a full immersion in Russian language, culture and language," Kirshner said. Isabella will join 15 other young dancers from across the United States in Moscow from July 16 to Aug. 27. They will train with the Bolshoi Ballet Academy and study Russian language, history, arts and culture during their stay.

"I'm really looking forward to learning a new language," Isabella said. "Russian is so exotic and has a different alphabet. When I come home, I will speak Russian to everyone and tell everyone all about the culture and what's different there. I love being a dancer — going to classes, rehearsals and performances," Isabella said. "Being in a production requires a lot of dedication and responsibility. I practice two hours a day five days a week." The Allentown High School sophomore is a member of Girl Scout Troop 646, St. Joseph's Church Youth Group and the Nordstrom BP Fashion Board for high school students. She also plays flute in the school's symphonic band.