

# Dancers make the grade

By VANITA PRASAD

A SHOT at the limelight is a step closer for two aspiring ballerinas selected for the 2012 Royal New Zealand Ballet Mentor Programme.

Libby-Rose Niederer, 13, and Madison Fotti-Knowles, 15, from Hobsonville's Cameron Ballet Academy were two of seven dancers nationwide selected for the programme last month.

The year-long programme is sponsored by The Edge theatre.

It pairs dancers up with professional ballerinas from the company who they can email and visit during the year.

Mentor students are selected based on their potential and commitment to the art.

Cameron Ballet Academy director Chrissy Cameron says she's extremely proud to have two girls chosen for the limited group.

"I've never had two selected and I don't personally know if that's ever happened before. It's great for our little school.

"Basically this is like the equivalent of the girls being mentored by their own personal All Black, because that's the level these dancers are at," Mrs Cameron says.

Libby-Rose and Madison applied for the programme by writing a letter and submitting a video.

"I wrote that I love ballet and it's my passion and I've always wanted to do it as my career," Libby-Rose says.

The Waimauku teenager has been practising ballet since she was four years old and is looking forward to working with her mentor Bronte Kelly from Queensland.

Ms Kelly started dancing at the age of four and went on to train at The Australian Ballet School.

She joined the Royal New Zealand Ballet in early 2011, performing in Tower Tutus on Tour, Stravinsky Selection and The Meridian Season of The Sleeping Beauty.

"I watched her in a company class. I went to see her at NYC and I've been following her on *The Secret Lives of Dancers*," Libby-Rose says.

"I was surprised when I met her that she was the same height as me. She's really awesome."

Madison found out that she had been selected through Libby-Rose.

"She came into class saying 'have you heard the good news, you must be excited' but I wasn't really sure



**Bright future:** Libby-Rose Niederer, 13, and Madison Fotti-Knowles, 15, are warming up for futures as professional ballerinas.  
Photo: VANITA PRASAD

what she was talking about," Madison says.

The Hobsonville dancer, who commits 12 hours a week to her art as well as keeping on top of her school work, also aspires to become a professional dancer.

She has been paired up with Emma White, a new addition to the Royal New Zealand Ballet.

Ms White of Auckland started

dancing at age six. In 2011 she graduated from the New Zealand School of Dance. She went on an exchange to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School and represented the school at the Alana Haines Australasian Awards where she was a supreme finalist.

For that she won a scholarship to the Rosella Hightower School in Cannes, France.

In 2011 she was on secondment to the RNZB, performing with the company during The Meridian Season of The Sleeping Beauty.

"She's a wonderful dancer. I met her at a recent master class," Madison says.

As well as emailing and visiting their mentors the girls will go to the company's Wellington headquarters and get to spend time backstage.