



## on & off broadway



At Applause performing arts school, Eric Freeman (c.) is only 16, but stars in their revival of "Nine."

### On N.Y. stages, there's an accent on youth

The teenage stars of "Billy Elliot" are expected to win big at Sunday's Tony Awards (CBS, 8 p.m.), but they're not the only young talent shaking up local stages.

High school students have been learning how to dramatize their lives in a citywide playwriting program called Wrote, run by the Manhattan Theatre Club. A week ago, Geraldo Vazquez, a 10th-grader at the New York Harbor School, in Brooklyn, presented a short work called "The Artist," about an adolescent whose father doesn't support his artistic dreams. "It was my first play," Vazquez said. "It felt good to express myself."

Fellow student Nayelie Melendez, a ninth-grader from the Dominican Republic, felt the same way. Her bilingual drama, "You Don't Know What You Have Until You Lose It," concerned a mother and daughter at odds.

This weekend, high school-age students at Applause NYC, a performing arts school, will present their version of "Nine," the 1982 best musical Tony winner about a film director struggling with the women in his life. "Guido has had many affairs, so it's a challenge to play when you're my age," says the show's leading man, Eric Freeman, a 16-year-old who lives on the upper East Side.

"Nine" runs tomorrow at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. at Applause's Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. Tickets are \$20; (212) 717-0703.

On June 15, student authors in the Fidelity FutureStage Playwriting Contest will present their works at the Imperial Theater, where "Billy Elliot" has the night off. FutureStage is designed to teach kids about playwriting, from concept to writing to performance.

Joe Dziemianowicz