

THE WORLD dances



YAGP Brings the World Together

Tamara Johnson on April 14, 2014, 8:54 p.m.

Ballet dancers are often asked in interviews why their art form remains relevant after more than 500 years. Answers include its connection to tradition, its enduring beauty, its ability to evolve to reflect cultural changes, and that ballet provides a language for self-expression. To the long list of why it matters, I'd like to add ballet's ability to cross boundaries and unite people. This was especially salient at the 2014 Youth America Grand Prix, the "Stars of Tomorrow Meet the Stars of Today" and their 15th Anniversary Gala performances in New York City last week.

Competitors between the ages of 9 and 19 came to perform in New York from over 30 countries and speaking 13 different languages. They were seen by representatives of some of the world's top dance academies and companies and were awarded scholarships to attend the institutions that would best develop their individual potential, regardless of the schools' or students' nationalities. The professionals dancing in the galas were multinational and multilingual as well, and represented a broad spectrum of styles -- from the Bolshoi's exemplary classicism to Momix's gasp-inducing creative physicality. The dancers learned new pieces and performed together gorgeously despite language or geopolitical barriers.

Few international ventures are so genuinely cooperative. For instance, NASA recently [suspended its ties](#) with Russian space science over the situation in the Crimean Peninsula. In contrast, Washington Ballet's Brooklyn Mack performed "Gopak," a solo based on a Ukrainian folkdance and performed notably in the past by Bolshoi Ballet and American Ballet Theatre alum and YAGP co-founder Gennadi Saveliev. Mack dedicated his performance to Saveliev, "who always just killed this piece," and called the veteran Russian performer on stage during the curtain call for a hug.



Brooklyn Mack of Washington Ballet in "Gopak."

Photo by Siggul/Visual Arts Masters.

On the last day of events, Wendy Perron interviewed Bolshoi Ballet Artistic Director Sergei Filin, who served on the YAGP panel of judges. Filin encouraged everyone to visit Moscow to see his company perform different pieces than it will be staging on its upcoming US tour. Via a translator, he also said the following regarding YAGP, the global power of ballet and the responsibility of the international community to nurture its next generation of artists:

"It is an enormous undertaking and very hard work to get together all these children and to make them believe that they can be dancers and that they can go forward. All this proves the point that ballet is alive today and is going to be alive tomorrow and has huge potential.

It's enormous happiness to witness these young children having this desire and the happiness in their eyes and to believe in themselves and to see that they all have a dream and they have high goals to achieve. It's our major obligation and responsibility to be close to them and to be able to support them on their path to success and to future achievement in their professional careers."

It's inspiring to see countries and generations come together to collaborate in the creation of art, both through performance and education. Congratulations to everyone involved in this year's competition, and to YAGP for its 15th anniversary.

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