

Edo Wijnen in Balanchine's *Tarantella*. Photo: Emma Kauldhar



Edo Wijnen. Photo: Robin du Puy

# Edo Wijnen

JESSICA TEAGUE catches up with the Dutch National Ballet soloist

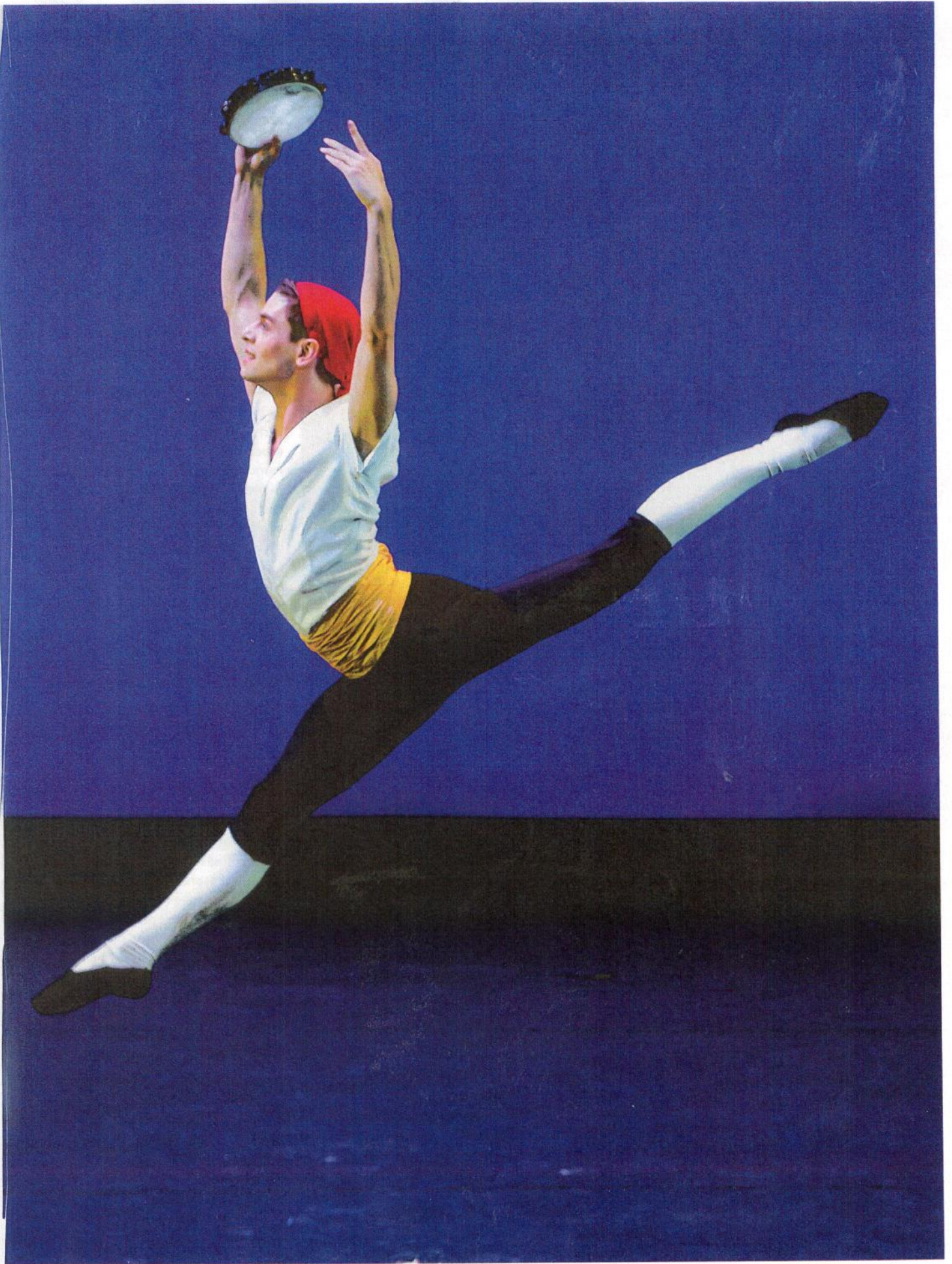
**W**hen did you join Dutch National Ballet and what was it about the company that attracted you most?

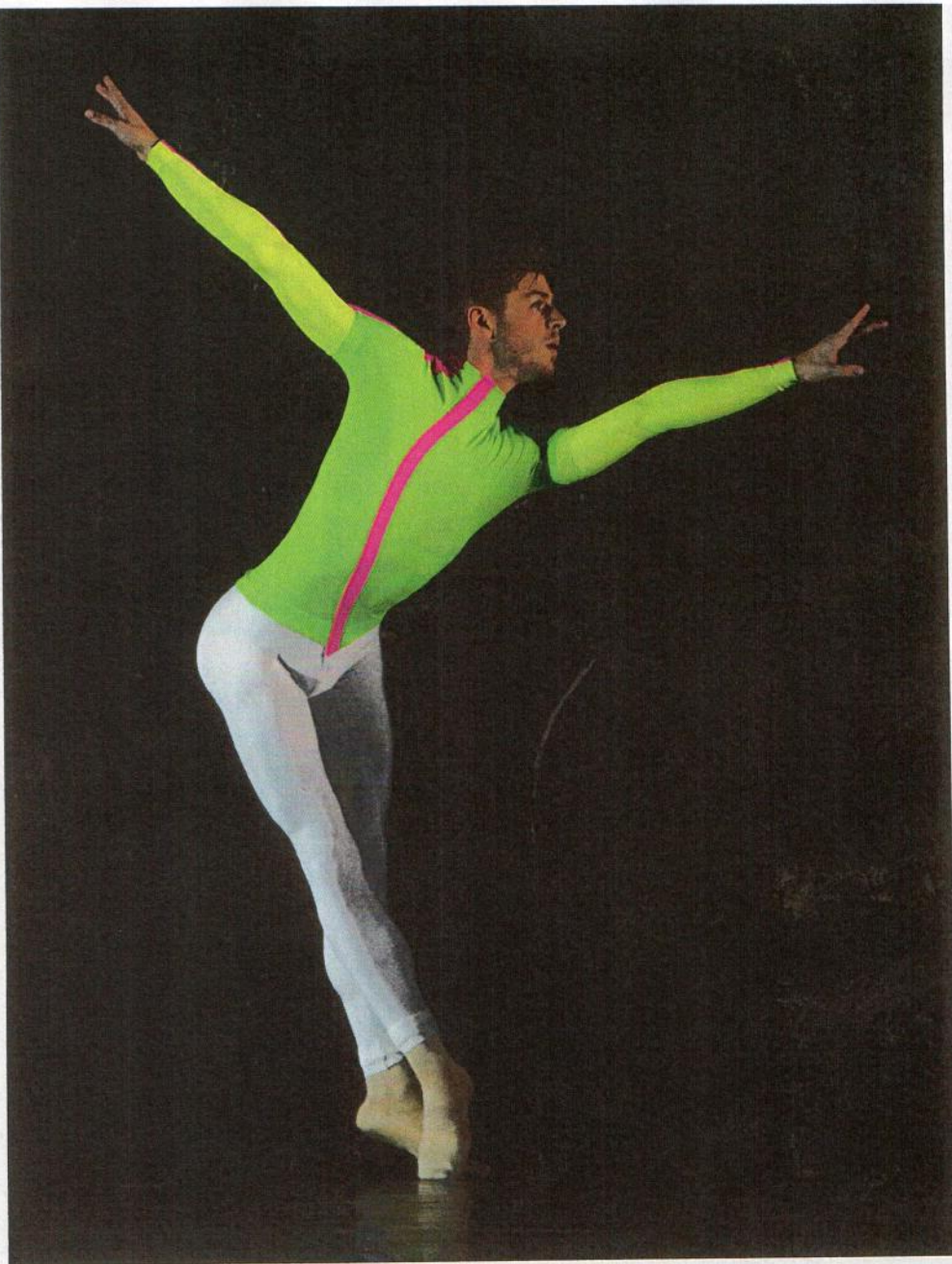
I joined in 2010, right after graduating from the Royal Ballet School in Antwerp, Belgium. I think what attracted me most was the repertoire. I always really wanted to dance ballets from Hans van Manen and David Dawson. Growing up I was a big fan of the Royal Ballet of Flanders, but I liked that Dutch National Ballet is a really big company. We are 88 dancers, including the junior company, and with so many dancers you have a lot

The same year you joined the company you also won the Dance Europe award at Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP) for outstanding artistry. Can you tell me about that?

I was still in school when I did YAGP, and it was an amazing experience. It was my first time in New York and I remember not being able to enjoy the city at all. I couldn't do any of the things that normal people do on a visit to New York. While my family went to all the tourist sites during the day, I went to the competition. However, in the end it was incredible and I met so many people that are still my friends today. The American audience is very outgoing; they go wild while you are

in in Balanchine's *Tarantella*. Photo: Emma Kauldhar





Dutch National Ballet - Edo Wijnen in David Dawson's *Overture*. Photo: Angela Sterling

## MILESTONES

**Born:** 3 May 1992 in Deune, Belgium

**Dance studies:** Royal Ballet School in Antwerp

**Company:** Dutch National Ballet - aspirant (2010); élève (2011); corps de ballet (2012); coryphée (2012); sujet (2014); soloist (2015).

**Awards:** Youth America Grand Prix (New York City, United States), 1st Prize and Dance Europe Outstanding Artistry Award 2010; Prix de Lausanne (Switzerland), scholarship, 4th, and Prix d'interprétation de danse contemporaine 2009.

danced *Esmeralda*, and the audience went insane; I had never heard a reaction like that in my life, so that encouraged me to go for it even more. Winning the *Dance Europe* outstanding artistry award was especially meaningful for me. Receiving an award for artistry in a competition that is so focused on technical perfection was a real boost. Of course, I was fighting for my best classical lines, but the artistic element of dance is the reason I do it.

### I hear recently you returned to New York to perform at the YAGP gala?

Yes, I went with my friend and colleague Michaela DePrince. When we were invited I was very excited, but when we arrived I got nervous because we were literally among principal dancers from New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Paris Opera and

and I'm happy that we went there. We danced *Rewind* from Juanjo Arques and *Tarantella* from George Balanchine, which is a bit tricky in a city that has a strong Balanchine legacy and is home to the New York City Ballet, but the audience loved both pieces.

### It sounds like Balanchine's works have a special appeal for you. What is your favourite Balanchine role to dance?

There are a lot! We do a lot of Balanchine work at Dutch National; it is part of who we are as dancers. As a member of the company you need to be able to dance Balanchine, as we usually do one big Balanchine programme each year. I've done many of Balanchine's works, in corps de ballet roles all the way up to principal parts. I've had some very inspiring experiences, like working on *Rubies* with Patricia Neary. Recently I got the chance to dance the lead in *Violin Concerto*, and really loved it. *Tarantella* is a hard piece - a killer, really, but so rewarding to dance. It's a character role that you can go all out performing and have fun. You can be nasty and ugly and you can play with a whole range of elements on stage. I love that about *Tarantella*.

### Right now you are working on a piece by David Dawson - how is that going?

We are working on *Overture*, a ballet David created for us a few years ago. It's lovely, I love to do David's work. I'm very excited to bring this piece back. It's a special piece for me, in which I have a beautiful role that David created for me. It's a bit different working on it this time because we have to put the ballet back together and relearn steps that we helped to create. I'm one of those dancers who pick up steps quite fast, but I also forget things really fast. If I don't perform something for two weeks, it's gone. I need the space in my head for the next ballet. So right now, at the start of this process, my body is recalling all the musicality but I'm working very hard with David's assistant, Tim Couchman, to get the steps back. We actually have four weeks to work on it, which is a lot of time for us. I'm very happy to have that space to really get back into the role and develop it into something that I'll be proud to present. I was 21 when the ballet was created and now I'm three years older, so I want to do something different with it artistically. David will come to work with us at the end of the rehearsal process, so I hope he likes it!

**During the six years you have been in the**

When I was 18 and first joined the company, David Dawson picked me out of the group to create a role in his ballet *Timelapse/(Mnemosyne)*. It was the first time that I really ever worked with a choreographer to create a ballet. I was scared at the beginning, but he gave me a lot of freedom to experiment and I quickly understood what he was looking for. We trusted each other. I trusted him to make something that was specifically me and he trusted me to then take that and make something that was his again. Also, when I first joined the company, I worked with Hans van Manen. I love working with Hans - his musicality, the way he moves, the way he gives dancers the freedom to put themselves into his choreographies – it's wonderful. Another highlight was *Chroma* from Wayne McGregor. It was an entirely new language for me that I found really interesting. It is, in general, a really cool piece and I really enjoyed doing it. Also the *Second detail* was the first piece I ever danced by William Forsythe and that was just incredible. It was a big thing for me, because while growing up I used to love watching Royal Ballet Flanders perform Forsythe's work. In the *Second Detail* I learned two different roles. At times I would do back-to-back stage rehearsals of the different pieces. It was crazy, but made the actual shows easier. I loved being the one who kicks the sign over at the end of the ballet; it is such a great moment!

#### How do you feel about the classical repertoire?

I think my first passion is for the neo classical and contemporary work, but I also love our classical repertoire. I guess I've always had an image in my head that I don't have the perfect body for classical ballet, so I feel like I always struggle to make things look like they do in the book. I am someone who often likes to just go for it and enjoy myself on stage, but with classical work you need to maintain and control the steps while also expressing that joy. When we perform the classical repertoire we work closely with our own staff and ballet masters, and we have some really good ones. I got to work with Charlotte Chapellier on *Swan Lake* when I danced the role of Alexander, Siegfried's friend. She showed me how to make the perfect lines for my body. It was so inspirational because my body and mind really understood everything she said. She made me a better classical dancer. I would love to do more classical roles that require you to really go deep into a character and invest yourself emotionally, but I know I need time to grow and develop into this.

#### Your career has progressed quickly: last year you were promoted to soloist at the age of 24. Do you ever feel pressured and how do you cope with this?

I feel pressure that I put on myself, but not from the artistic team or anyone else. Actually the staff is very supportive. They sometimes push me

they push me to become a better dancer and more confident without pressure. I felt more pressure at school and during the competitions than I do in the company now.

#### What can we look forward to seeing you dance in the coming season?

I'm very excited about next season because most of the repertoire we are doing will be new for me. We are doing *Coppélia*, *La Bayadère*, *Onegin* and a series of choreographies all made in Amsterdam. I'm very excited about that programme because David Dawson is making a new piece based on *The Little Prince*.

#### You grew up in Antwerp, only two hours away from Amsterdam. Is living in the Netherlands very different from Belgium?

No, it's not very different. One of the reasons I chose to go to Dutch National Ballet is because it was close to home. I have a very close relationship with my family; they have always supported me so I wanted to remain near them. The Dutch are more outgoing than the Belgians. They are straightforward and if they don't like something they will say it. In Belgium they will find a way around saying anything negative to stay polite. I love how in Amsterdam everyone says what is on his or her mind. I used to go back to Antwerp every weekend, but recently I've only been going back a few times a year. My family comes to visit me here instead. My life is in Amsterdam now, and I love the friends I've made. My work, my house, my new family are all here and I'm happy.

Edo Wijnen and Michaela DePrince in Juanjo Arques's *Rewind*. Photo: Emma Kauldhar

