

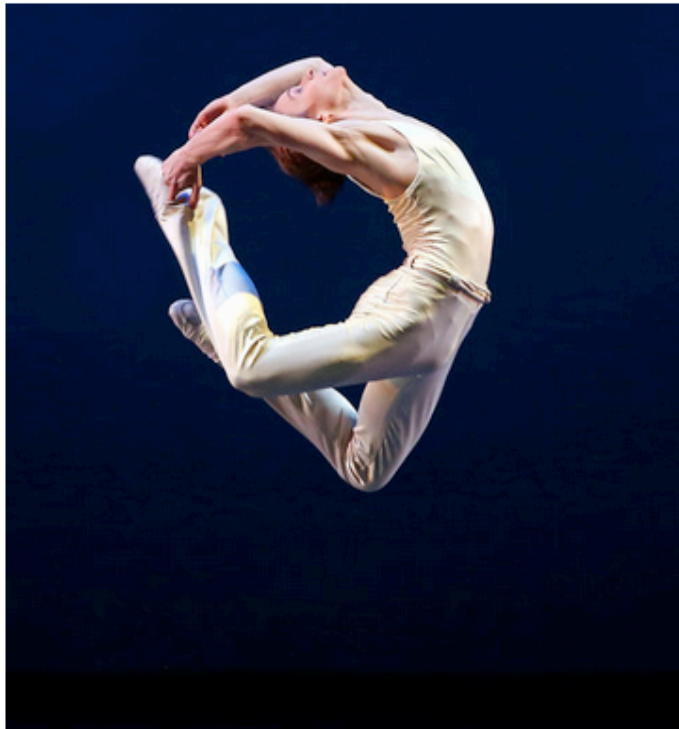
# The New York Times

DANCE | DANCE REVIEW

## A Feast With Some Unusual Pairings

Youth America Grand Prix Gala Inspires Young Dancers

By BRIAN SEIBERT APRIL 13, 2014



Youth America Grand Prix Gala Daniil Simkin of American Ballet Theater in Ailey's "Pas de Duke" at the David H. Koch Theater, Lincoln Center. Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

In the parlance of [Youth America Grand Prix](#), a ballet convention and competition now in its 15th year, one purpose of its gala shows is for its young participants, the “stars of tomorrow,” to be inspired by “the stars of today,” the ballet luminaries who perform. The young dancers watching the closing night celebration at the David H. Koch Theater on Friday, an affair more than three hours long, could be inspired without being dispirited by flawlessness.

Which is to say that the show was a bag both full and mixed. There were 10 duets, two solos and one pas de trois, and so the New York premiere of Justin Peck's 2012 “Distractions” would have been refreshing simply by virtue of its being a quartet. But Mr. Peck's

choreography, combining three of his New York City Ballet colleagues (Jared Angle, Taylor Stanley and Daniel Ulbricht) with American Ballet Theater's James Whiteside, was also dynamic, invigorating and playful, sensitive to the shifting moods of a piano piece by the contemporary composer Alexander Rosenblatt played by Susan Walters.

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For the premiere of Andrea Schermoly's "Kübler Ross," City Ballet's Joaquin de Luz joined San Francisco Ballet's Maria Kochetkova for an impassioned rendering of a less-than-clear study of the stages of grief. Evan McKie's "Wiegenlied" Pas de Deux," a new work he danced with the Bolshoi Ballet's Olga Smirnova, was merely anodyne. "OnVelvet," the ridiculously overwrought Marco Goecke solo that Mr. McKie danced later, was embarrassing.

"I don't normally choreograph," Mr. McKie said in one of the unilluminating and sometimes unintentionally comic videos that introduced each piece. Then he dedicated "Wiegenlied" to his mother and to all mothers. In another video, Beckanne Sisk of Ballet West revealed that "Light Rain," the fake-sexy, fake-exotic Gerald Arpino duet she danced with Joffrey Ballet's Fabrice Calmels, was one of her favorites. Good taste was not much in evidence during the evening as a whole, though "Tuu," a Momix duet similar in tone to "Light Rain," at least featured truly impressive acrobatics.

In the video preceding Alvin Ailey's face-off duet "Pas de Duke," Daniil Simkin of Ballet Theater asked the audience to go easy on him since he was out of his natural element. Paired as he was with the Ailey star Linda Celeste Sims, Mr. Simkin needed all the indulgence the audience could muster. City Ballet's Ashley Bouder fared much better in the uncharacteristic territory of "La Sylphide." (She gave some of the credit to her coach, the injured Bolshoi artistic director Sergei Filin, who was also one of this year's judges.) The unusual pairing of her with the Bolshoi's Semyon Chudin didn't have much chemistry. The pairing of her colleague Lauren Lovette with Ballet Theater's Herman Cornejo in the pas de deux from Balanchine's "Rubies" had more sparkle, though the dancer looked underrehearsed.

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Not surprisingly, the tried-and-true pairings had more polish: two duets by Lucia Lacarra and Marlon Dino of Bavarian State Ballet and Ms. Smirnova and Mr. Chudin in Balanchine's "Diamonds." Before Brooklyn Mack, a Youth America alumnus with the Washington Ballet, danced "Gopak," he expressed trepidation because Gennadi Saveliev, a founder of Youth America, had "killed" the piece in the past. Yet Mr. Mack's dancing needed no disclaimer: He killed it, too.

***Correction: April 18, 2014***

*A dance review on Monday about the Youth America Grand Prix show at the David H. Koch Theater last Friday night misspelled the surname of a dancer who performed. She is Maria Kochetkova, not Kotchetkova.*

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