

# YAGP

## in Paris and Barcelona

YAGP - Aviva Gelfer-Mundi - 1st Place Senior Women's Division - Classical - in Paris. Photo: Emma Kauldhar

EMMA KAULDHAR  
and DEBORAH WEISS  
see who cut the  
mustard at the Youth  
America Grand Prix  
European semi-finals

**W**ith the Paris semi-finals attracting more aspirants than could be accommodated at the Théâtre André Malraux in Rueil-Malmaison, on the outskirts of Paris, Youth America Grand Prix has expanded its presence in Europe this year by adding a second date in San Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona. As with all YAGP's semi-finals, which are also held in Brazil,

Korea, China, Japan, Mexico, Australia and throughout the US, one of the key aims for competitors is to be selected for the Finals, which will be held in New York in April 2018. Participation in this event affords the opportunity to be seen by school and company directors from around the world. Many of today's leading dancers have had their careers escalated through being seen at YAGP. So, who cut the mustard in Paris this year?

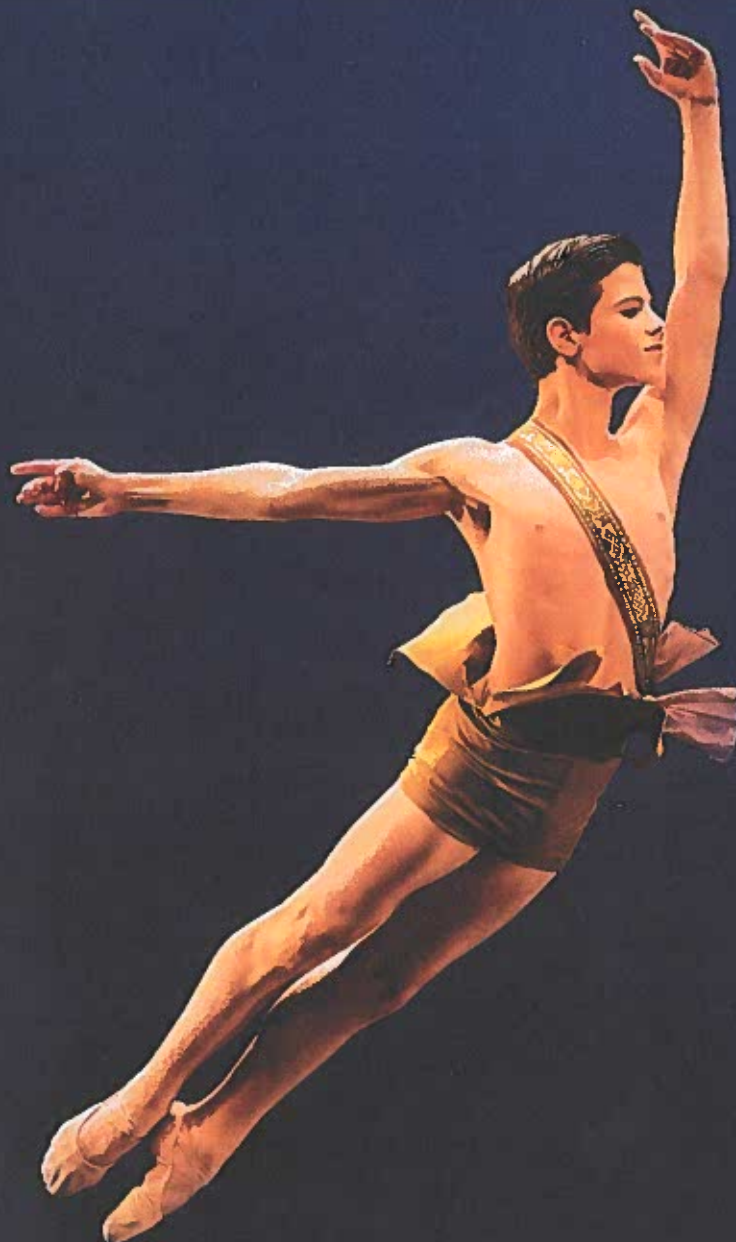
YAGP - Francesco Fasano - 1st Place Senior Men's Division - Classical - in Paris. Photo: Emma Kauldhar

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YAGP - Antonio Casalinho, Winner of the Youth Grand Prix in Paris. Photo: Emma Kauldhar

Overall, the standard in the junior age division was more riveting than in the senior, and this may well be down to the fact that once dancers start training at a leading vocational school, they are less inclined to participate in competitions and, indeed, are often discouraged by schools who fear losing their star pupils to another school. While this is understandable, it could also be conceived as a bit narrow minded, as outstanding competitors are good ambassadors for their schools. Representatives from the UK were disappointingly thin on the ground, with Elmhurst being the only leading vocational school to send a group of dancers – a venture that paid off in that

rendition of one of the variations from the pas de trois in *Swan Lake* Act I, made it through to the final round. And, at the end of the evening, she was placed in the top 12 dancers in the Senior Women's Classical Division. The top three prizes in this group went to Aviva Gelfer-Mundi (16), a student at the V&T Classical Academy, who zapped through her *Diana & Acteon* - wacky split extensions - to clinch the 1<sup>st</sup> place; Viktoria Melnychuk (15) from the Kiev Choreographic College, whose *Harlequinade* was neat, precise and charming without being queasily cute – she was 2<sup>nd</sup>; and Clara Pevl (15) from Synopsis Dance, who gave a very commendable *Raymonda* (a popular solo this year) for a 15-year-old, to win 3<sup>rd</sup>.

group, but still some outstanding talent nevertheless. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> places went to students from the Ballettschule Theater Basel – Francesco Fasano (17), who gave a lovely, buoyant James and Mikiya Kakehashi (18), a dashing *Corsaire* – while the 3<sup>rd</sup> place was a tie between Colin Jacobs (15), from the Finnish National Opera Ballet School, and Rubens Simon (16), studying at Ballet Studio Marius.

While the senior Grand Prix was not awarded, the Youth Grand Prix went to the outstandingly gifted Antonio Casalinho from the Academia Annarella. His name is not new to YAGP regulars, and although he is only 14 he has already notched up numerous awards and even has his own website. His *Corsaire* variation is easily found online and demonstrates a technical control that is awesome for his age. But rather than that of a precocious prodigy, Casalinho's stage presence appears very mature and his tricks are elegantly engineered – so much so that one almost missed a triple tour. His solo in Paris augured the makings of a male principal dancer of note.

The other three junior men to be placed were Giuseppe Ventura (13), whose virtuosic *Corsaire* won him 1<sup>st</sup> place; Samuel Bassler (14) from the Ballett Akademie Munich, who was 2<sup>nd</sup>, and Paola Palumbo (12) from Domus Danza, who was 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Among the junior women, the standouts were Audrey Freeman (14), a student at the Tanya Pearson Classical Coaching Academy, whose technical assurance and easy jump won her 1<sup>st</sup> place; a very promising Nina Cagrin (12), from the Wiener Staatsoper Ballettakademie, who was 2<sup>nd</sup>, and Margarita Fernandez (12) from Academia Annarella – a joyous *Giselle* - and Suzie Pevl (12) from Synopsis Dance – a spirited *Kitri* – who tied 3<sup>rd</sup>. The standard in this round, however, was pretty even across the board and there are arguably ten other candidates who only just missed out on a prize through bad luck. E.K.

In Barcelona, the most impressive group of dancers was among the Seniors, although the Juniors were not lacking - it's simply harder to make a realistic assessment of a 12-year-old doing a major classical variation. However, at the Junior level, the key is potential, and in this group of mainly Spanish, Italian and Portuguese (though there were some outsiders),

there were some lovely surprises. I would have liked to have seen much more attention to musicality. There is no excuse for being behind or ahead of the music, particularly when you have practised with a tape for weeks; it can produce very two-dimensional performances. Having said that, those dancers who thoroughly embraced the music - indeed, made it integral to their performances - stood out.

It could also be helpful to have some clarification as to what constitutes contemporary dance. A solo that includes classical pirouettes or fouettés does not reveal the dancer's versatility in today's climate, and endless rolls on the floor lack imagination. However, what comes across in abundance is the extraordinary courage of these children, some just starting secondary school.

In the Junior Category, with both the men and women, those with top-quality training in both the contemporary and classical shone through. Placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Classical, Sofia Maestri (13) from Academy Asd showed real promise in *Le Corsaire* for her warmth, her footwork and, most apparent, her port de bras. Beatriz Domingues (14), placed 2<sup>nd</sup>, has great potential, with a beautiful face, footwork and excellent control. But Rebecca Rudolf (14), from Academia Annarella, was a likely winner from the moment she set foot on stage. Dancing *Aurora Act III*, I noted her face, arms, feet, quality, and had underlined 'phrasing' - musicality always wins through.

The young men in the Junior Classical Category revealed some remarkable talents. Bernardo Costa (14) from Academia Annarella and Dorian Plasse (13) from Ko Studio gave incredibly mature performances and were tied 3<sup>rd</sup>. Plasse really dances - he's not just going through the motions. In 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Filippo Mambelli (12) from Ateneo Danza gave a wonderful rendition of Peasant Pas in *Giselle*, very well trained with clean footwork - even if he looked like he needed to grow into his tights. The man who took our breath away was Francisco Gomes (14), from Academia Annarella once again. As he leapt through Albrecht's Act II solo with extraordinary fluidity, holding the end of his attitude turns as if he was waiting for the wind to change, the audience whooped with delight. A major talent - his real sense of the character he was portraying showed a maturity way beyond his years.

In the Junior Contemporary women,

Dance Center took first prize and looked set to win from the start. Once again, her mature approach made a big impression. Margardia Goncalves (13) from Academia Annarella and Berta Sierra Blemonte (14) from Jove Ballet were 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively and both demonstrated a good grasp of the genre. Interestingly, with the men, it was Plasse who won, with Gomes in 2<sup>nd</sup> - proving their versatility. In 3<sup>rd</sup> was David Pellisé Solanelles (14) from Escuela de Danza Marisa Yudes, most memorable for his stage presence.

In the Ensemble sections, it wasn't altogether surprising that in 3<sup>rd</sup> place was Ateneo Danza, joint 2<sup>nd</sup> were Il Balletto and Jove Ballet and in 1<sup>st</sup> was Academia Annarella, all four of which are producing an overwhelming number of truly excellent students.

In the Senior Women's Classical Category, the competition was strong. Emma Mardegan (16), from Il Balletto, seemed an obvious winner, displaying beautiful entrechats sixes and very strong pirouettes in her *Paquita* solo. Mathilde

Stokkebro (15) from the Royal Danish Ballet School, in 2<sup>nd</sup>, was delightful in the Bournonville style, and Sarah Trinder (16), in 3<sup>rd</sup>, from a UK-based independent school, was excellent throughout.

In the Senior Men's Category, Melvin Lawovi (17), VM Ballet School, and Pau Pujol (18), Corella Dance Academy, both displayed professional-level performances with panache, and tied 1<sup>st</sup>. In 2<sup>nd</sup> place, Miguel Angel Maidana (18), currently at Brussels International Ballet, soared through his solos, both classical and contemporary, looking ready to embark on a professional career. Lorenzo Collatuzzo (17), in 3<sup>rd</sup>, gave a clean Siegfried Act III.

In the Contemporary, Afonso Coelho (15) was 1<sup>st</sup>, Guiseppe Scaramuzzi (15), whose smooth quality impressed, was 2<sup>nd</sup>, and Crispin Maccatrozzo (15), in 3<sup>rd</sup>, produced an excellent performance. Finally, a mention for Harris Beattie (19) from Central School of Ballet, who gave exemplary performances in both his contemporary and *Le Corsaire* variations. D.W.

YAGP - Olivia Parham, Finalist, Senior Women's Division - Classical - in Paris. Photo: Emma Kauldhar

