

ONLINE EDITION

**"Peter the Great" Gala: A Celebration of Peter Pestov's Life in Ballet
Presented by Youth America Grand Prix on April 23, 2009**

**Review by Wendy Perron
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Let's Hear It for the Teachers

We know the names of the famous dancers of today, but we never know the names of the teachers who trained them. So said Alexei Ratmansky while introducing an evening at City Center devoted to the great Bolshoi men's teacher, Peter Pestov, on his 80th birthday. Ratmansky said that Pestov's classes stress elegance and solid discipline, but other than that, we judge him by his illustrious students. The list includes Vladimir Malakhov, Sascha Radetsky, Gennadi Saveliev, Yuri Possokhov, and Ratmansky himself, all of whom either danced or contributed choreography for this sparkling tribute, organized by Youth America Grand Prix.

The program, entitled "Peter the Great: A Tribute to a Legendary Ballet Teacher," began with a demonstration by boys of the graduating class of the John Cranko School of Stuttgart Ballet, where Pestov has taught since 1996. Though rather prolonged for a proscenium setting, this series of academic steps gave us a chance to see the precision; the plush, quiet landings; and the two-feet to two-feet jumps that cover space and show off the rock-solid lower bodies of these students.

The program also gave us a peek at the current Sascha Radetsky, now at Dutch National Ballet. He danced a solo from Hans Van Manen's *5 Tangos*, giving it a thrust and spirit that was new to those of us who had seen him with ABT. He also

danced a section from Tharp's *Sinatra Suite* with the dazzling and sexy Karine Plantadit—not sexy like a kitten but sexy like a leopardess.

Because YAGP always puts on a great show, it also included ABT's Marcelo Gomes dancing the *Manon* bedroom scene with Viktoria Tereshkina from the Maryinsky Ballet. As he does with all his partners, he brought out the ravishing part of her.

Alicia Amatriain from Stuttgart Ballet danced with Pestov grad Mikhail Kaniskin of Berlin State Opera Ballet in Forsythe's razor-edged *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* pas de deux. She gave it the right slump and aggression, but overstretched her extensions beyond the split point. In a completely different mood, she was hilarious in Christian's Spuck's *Le Grand Pas de Deux*—the most guffaw-worthy performance I'd seen of this brilliant duet. And it did us all good.

But I got the biggest charge out of seeing Ratmansky's *Middle Duet*, again with the utterly fabulous Yekaterina Kondourova and her partner Islom Baimuradov. I can't begin to describe why I like it so much, except that Yuri Khanon's music is beguiling, and the duet builds on a simple tendu that mysteriously expands to include a bracing defiance, gritty intimacy, and juicy abandon.