

Ballet Asia Pages

diary@balletasia.com www.balletasia.com



YAGP in Osaka

Yuki Ogasawara, 1st Place, Senior Division
シニア女子1位 小笠原由紀



Tatsuki Takada, 1st Place, Senior Division

シニア男子1位 高田樹

YAGP in Osaka

EMMA MANNING admires promising young talent in Japan

There's not so much as a bicycle in sight but, as the red light is still shining, the pedestrians wait patiently on the kerb for the green signal. For one used to darting precariously between juggernauts in London, such discipline seems unreal, but for the Japanese patience and discipline are innate in their upbringing. And it shows in everything they do, whether it's technology, cuisine or ballet!

Japan's investment in the latter was clearly demonstrated at the Japanese semi-finals for the Youth America Grand Prix, held this year in Amagasaki near Osaka, with 610 individual entrants and 11 groups. No, I did not sit them all, but I did watch all of the juniors and seniors who made it through to the final round. I was hugely impressed by the technical standards attained by many of the candidates - triple pirouettes and Sylvie six o'clocks were de rigueur. That said, I wonder if some of the teachers are pushing their students a little too over zealously, and putting too much emphasis on gymnastic dexterity at the expense of artistic style. Take, for instance, the relevé attitudes at the start of Aurora's variation. Petipa's choreography for *The Sleeping Beauty* is more about delicacy and restraint than kicking your toe on your head, and the back leg in the aforementioned attitudes needs to be a certain angle if it is not to destroy its aesthetic beauty.

Candidates are able to choose from a wide range of variations in the classical repertoire and one of this year's favourites for the girls was Diana, with its plunging penchés en pointe (several young dancers gave us 180 degree balances). Diana was the choice of the junior division 1st prize winner, Saori Otsudo, blessed with a ballerina physique and a strong technique. The 2nd place went to Kurumi Shibadaira, whose Black Swan was astonishingly polished for a 12 year old. Her tutu, though, was a little over the top. Kanami Uenishi scooped the 3rd place with a controlled Paquita variation.

There were far fewer boys in the competition, but some of the juniors were more outstanding, and less nervous, than some of the senior men. 13 year old Kota Fujishima knocked off six turns with fascinating ease and was placed 1st, while Masaya Yamamoto's Frantz, cleanly danced and offering good musicality, won him second place. The third junior prize went to Takihimo Tamagawa, whose controlled extension out of his final spin was impressive.

Of the other juniors, I also enjoyed Madoka Ishikawa, who delivered an animated Diana, Saeka Shirai, a deceptively fragile looking dancer who danced an assured Dulcinea, and Hirona Nagashima who delivered a triumphant set of grands fouettés in her Swanilda variation. Tall and elegant, Saki Tokushima demonstrated an easy jump in her *Corsaire*, while Miho Naotsuka danced with much precision and, too, engaged us with her face.

On to the seniors, and the winner was 19 year old Yuki Ogasawara, a lovely dancer with an easy technique. In fact, she so impressed one of the judges, Jason Beechey that, after a quick call home to director Aaron Watkin, he was able to offer her an apprentice contract with the Dresden SemperOper Ballett with immediate effect. Risako Toda Ikeda won second place in the senior division for her unforced technique and musicality in *Corsaire*, while Miu Yamauchi, delivering fluid jetés, was third.

The senior boys were surprisingly uneven, ranging from excellent to not very good. No complaints about the three winners though: Tatsuki Takada's *Basilio* was very polished and professionally danced; Gento Yoshimoto's *Flames of Paris* was laced with slick turns; and Kota Sato's *Basilio*, while a tad reckless, was incredibly well presented for a 15 year old.

Among the other dancers in the senior division who caught the eye were Akane Yoshimura with a breezy Cupid; Risako Ikeda, flowing beautifully through her *Corsaire*; Rei Yamamoto, presenting an elegant Aurora; Asuka Tsuchida, charming and technically assured in her Swanilda; and last but not least Yuuka Sagawa, whose *Raymonda* solo was beautifully phrased and artistically aware. Sagawa, who is only 15, has great ballerina potential and she won my vote for *Dance Europe's* Award for Outstanding Artistry.

The winners are all invited to participate in the finals of the YAGP, the world's largest student ballet scholarship competition, which will be held in New York from 17 - 22 April 2009.



Yuuka Sagawa - Outstanding Artistry Award

THE WINNERS

SENIOR AGE DIVISION

WOMEN

1st Place

Yuki Ogasawara, 19 (Yamamoto Studio)

2nd Place

Risako Toda Ikeda, 15 (Ballet Studio DUO)

3rd Place

Miu Yamauchi, 16 (Funatsuki Naomi Ballet Studio)

MEN

1st Place

Tatsuki Takada, 17
(Hakucho Ballet Academy)

2nd Place

Gento Yoshimoto, 17

(Studio Ballet International)

3rd Place

Kota Sato, 15 (Shimura Masahiro Yuko Ballet Studio)

JUNIOR AGE DIVISION

WOMEN

1st Place

Saori Otsudo, 13 (Soki Ballet School)

2nd Place

Kurumi Shibadaira, 12
(Emi Aiba Ballet Studio)

3rd Place

Kanami Uenishi, 14 (Koike Ballet Studio)

MEN

1st Place

Kota Fujishima, 13 (Ballet Studio Gem)

2nd Place

Masaya Yamamoto, 14
(Akiko Yokokura Ballet School)

3rd Place

Takahiro Tamagawa 14
(Etoile Ballet School)

SPECIAL AWARDS

Outstanding Artistry Award

(Presented by Dance Europe Magazine)

Yuuka Sagawa, 15

(Ohara Yoshimi Ballet Studio)