

# dance INTERNATIONAL



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## New York

The Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP) gala almost brims over — sheer abundance makes this event stand out on the city's dance calendar. The annual spectacle, which returned to New York City Centre in April, offers young competitors, star debuts and choreographic premieres all gathered in one place for a single night's performance.

The audience seemed to pack the theatre as snugly as the 350 beaming competition finalists who shared the stage in the *Grand Defilé*, the choreographic pageant that concluded the first half of the gala. This first half showcased youngsters aged 12-19; and the defilé, ingeniously assembled like a massive jigsaw puzzle by Carlos dos Santos, Jr., seemed emblematic of the competition's ambitious scale.

Blocs of dancers emerged from the sides to flank a buzzing central hive or circulated and flew around its perimeter. In the theatre lobby, relatives and fans performed a haphazard defilé attempting to pierce the crowds encircling dance-world luminaries.

With its thousands of participants, the spread of classical ballet throughout the world becomes a vivid reality at

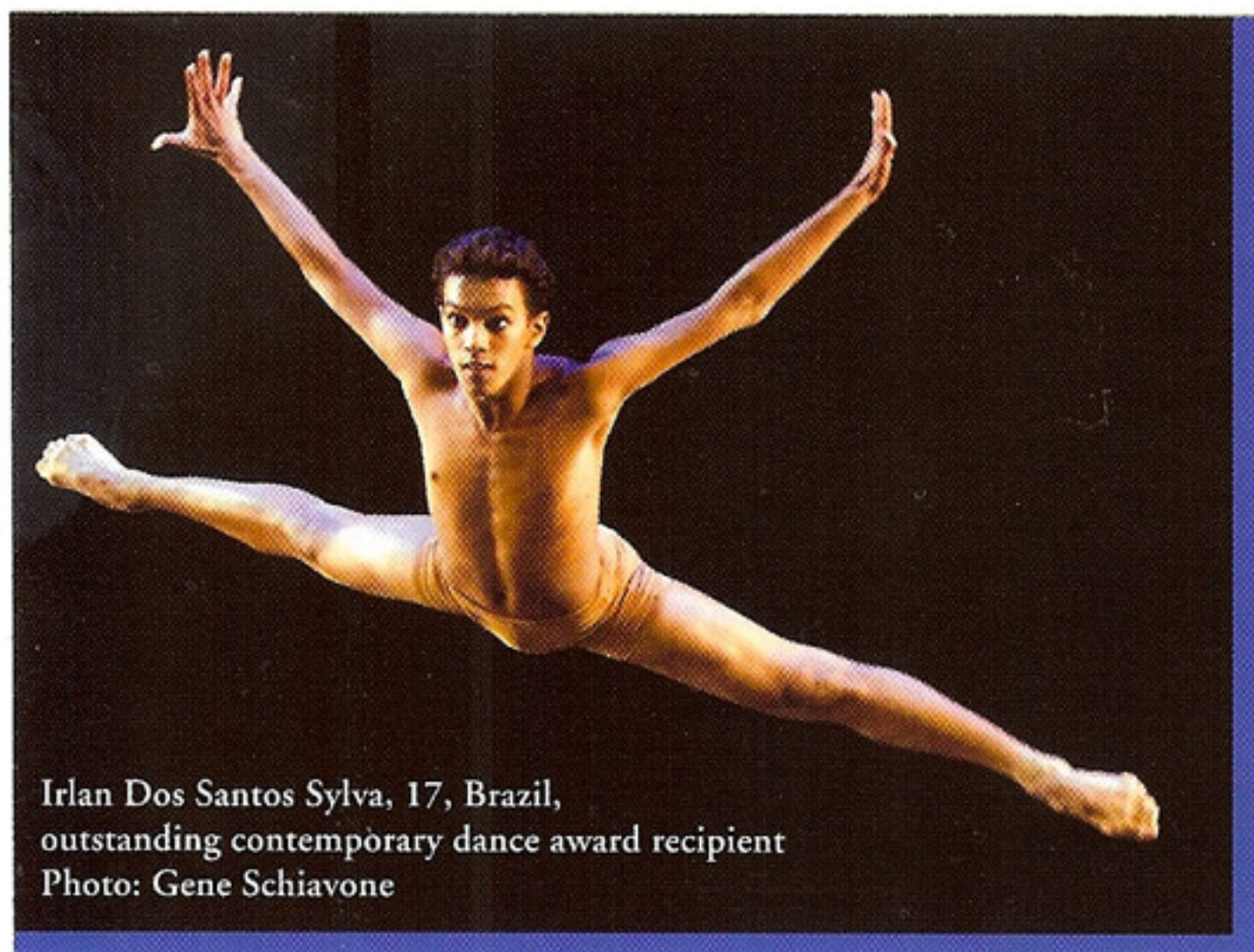
YAGP. Here viewers find themselves literally pressed against the wall by ballet's surging popularity.

Sometimes, at this event, the light and fearless students manage to outshine the professionals who perform in the second half of the programme. That was not the case this year, however. The most valiant and talented youngsters — male — were punchy yet still unlimber.

Estéban E. Hernández, 13, performed a variation from *Diana and Acteon*; Zhang Zhi Yao, 14, was soaring and precise in *Napoli*; Derek Dunn, 12, was a small but impassioned rabble-rouser in *The Flames of Paris*; and Vadim Muntagirov, 17, who displayed elegance and maturity in *Don Quixote*. The young women either wasted their gifts on sub-standard choreography created for the occasion, or lacked the style and personality demanded by classical numbers.

The second half, in contrast, offered a dream selection of international stars, beginning with the pairing of rock-solid Roberto Bolle, from La Scala, and vital Greta Hodgkinson, from the National Ballet of Canada, in an excerpt from Jiri Kylian's *Petite Mort*. What a way to open the second half! Kylian's brilliantly inventive partnering, and the speed and sensitivity of these two interpreters, were easily the highlight of the evening for those not overwhelmed by the brute force of two up-and-comers from the Bolshoi Ballet, Natalia Osipova and Ivan Vasiliev, who also danced *Flames of Paris*.

What is the Bolshoi Ballet up to these days? *The Flames of Paris* can be a charming, old-fashioned dazzler, but taken seriously as propaganda it becomes cautionary. Vasiliev and Osipova gave a performance that



Irlan Dos Santos Sylva, 17, Brazil,  
outstanding contemporary dance award recipient  
Photo: Gene Schiavone

suggested a throwback, not only to the sort of Soviet-style heroics that may make some viewers feel like biting down on a leather strap, but also to an inane 1930s-type naiveté.

Their elevation was phenomenal. Osipova, her legs knotted with muscle, sprang straight up in the air; Vasiliev, more suave

in his physicality, seemed impetuous and unstoppable as a gale. During the curtain calls, she greeted her vociferous admirers wide-eyed with a bobbing curtsy, her skirts pinched between thumb and forefinger.

For those enamored of classical refinement, two dancers trained in China and representing Hong Kong Ballet offered *Grand Pas Classique*. Ballerina Jin Yao, in particular, danced this item with wondrous calm, her shoulders perfectly relaxed and her arms draped exquisitely. Yet clearly she has the resilience needed to execute the most demanding tours de force. This is a dancer in command of a terrific instrument and she deserves greater exposure.

The much anticipated local debut of Berlin State Opera Ballet's Polina Semionova, ardently partnered by Bolle, seemed hampered by her unsuitability for the role of Carmen. Almost shy in her long-limbed beauty, Semionova is not one to flash with temper and taunt with sensual malice.

New York City Ballet's Wendy

Whelan, throwing her arms wildly about, essayed George Balanchine's *Chaconne* rather too soon after the divine Nina Ananiashvili had visited New York with the same pas de deux.

Friendly grins and salesmanship are no substitute for style and power, although Whelan glided smoothly through transitions and her partner, Philip Neal, acquitted himself airily.

The evening concluded with a blast of colour and sensuality. *Le Corsaire* unleashed American Ballet Theatre's José Manuel Carreño, whose dynamism cannily masked his superb, technical control. Carreño played Ali, subservient to the dramatic Medora of Tokyo Ballet's Mizuka Ueno, while David Hallberg amplified the role of Conrad compellingly with stately gestures and pride.

Neither of the two premieres made much of an impression, but at least choreographer Marcelo Gomes' *Tacacá* created suspense dramatizing the tension between partners Sarawanee Tanatanit and Blaine Hoven, a couple of beginners from American Ballet Theatre. On an evening that often underscored the young performers' innocence, this duet intriguingly pointed to experience.

*Robert Johnson*