



The Juniors ROCK!

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As I walk out the front door of the New York City Center, there is a buzz in the air. If you listen closely, the buzz turns into a name repeated over and over again: Esteban Hernandez.

By far, the junior men's division at this year's Youth America Grand Prix is the most exciting, as cabrioles continue to fly higher and pirouettes increase in number and suspension. But even with all of the fierce competition in this 12-14 year old category, Hernandez soars the highest through the air with hooked feet and a sense of masculinity and confidence that a lot of junior men just don't have.

Esteban Hernandez' older brother, Isaac, won the junior division in 2003, so apparently these ballet genes run in the family. Although, I'm sure that his training at the prestigious Rock School is a strong factor in his recipe for success.

The Rock School not only presents to the audience beautiful technicians in each category of the competition, but also brings to the table students with that "something special". The Rock School students *rock* every section of the competition. Their students take risks in their pieces making the whole audience hold their breath until each phenomenal step is completed, which is rewarded with joyous screams of appraisal.

Michaela DePrince, a thirteen year old in the junior women division, is up there in that top tier with Hernandez as she brings a unique flair to *La Bayadere*. Ms. DePrince is my pick for female dancer of the evening. She starts the piece abruptly tilting to the side, développé-ing

à la seconde en pointe as the leg goes past 180! Her attitude jetés are all over-splits. As the entire crowd gasps every time she développés à la seconde, she just smiles and shows absolutely no effort as her leg creates a seam with the side of her head. To boot, she has such a sweet personality on stage, making it impossible for anyone to be a hater for her being such a fierce diva at thirteen.

Not quite as impressive this evening is the male and female senior division that showcases

15-19 year olds. The competition isn't as intense post-intermission, but there are a few stand outs. In the female senior division, Beckanne Sisk, another Rock student, knocks us out with an abrupt dive into a penché en relevé to open the piece, which she repeats at least three times as flawlessly as the first one.

A firecracker of a dancer, Misako Mori, dances my favorite *Don Quixote* variation of the evening (and there are *many* of these). She rushes on stage swishing her long red skirt with fervor, a fervor that lives in all of her extremities and her flirty attitude all the way to the end.

In the senior male division, Young Gyu Choi, brings us yet another look at *Don Quixote*, and while he doesn't bring the colorful character that Ms. Mori brings, he is the most flawless technician of this category. At one point, he does 4 pirouettes into a double coupé turn in plié before ending with two more pirouettes, the last of which is suspended as the music seems to hold its breath before he ends to grand applause.

iDANZ Critix Corner
Review by Adrienne Jean Fisher
Performance: YAGP 09 NYC Finals
Venue: New York City Center
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At the start of the fifth *La Esmeralda* variation in the senior women division, I have the entire piece memorized knowing exactly when each triple pirouette and tambourine crash is coming, creating a very high standard for the fifth *La Esmeralda* to execute nothing less than clean triple pirouettes and fierce musicality. Unfortunately, the first *La Esmeralda* variation, performed by Madoka Kariya, is the only one who possesses the high level of musicality for this tambourine dance. A stunning moment is when she ends the piece with a jete-attitude, her back attitude hitting the tambourine held by her hand high in the air at the precise moment in the music.

It is difficult to be at the end of a competition because the audience is tired and has seen everything after this three hours and fifteen minutes of brilliant performances. Although there were just a few who really stand out this evening, it could have been so different on another evening, and this is just the nature of putting yourself into a competition.

But, all in all, this is such a good experience for these children. When you enter the professional world, you must thrust yourself into a competition on a daily basis with your peers as you audition for companies and gigs. No matter the outcome of this evening (the results will be announced at the Gala tomorrow night), each of these pre-professionals can put on their resumes that they made it to the Youth America Grand Prix finals in New York City, an accomplishment that will not go unnoticed.

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