

Bravos all round for the SAIBC



By [Debbie Hathway](#)

25 Feb 2014

The fourth South African International Ballet Competition (SAIBC), supported by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF), is over, leaving participants well pleased with the outcomes. Panel chairman Hae Shik Kim, founding dean of the Korean National University of Arts School of Dance, said that the local entrants were much improved and that the event had now reached an international standard. It's organised by Dirk Badenhorst and held every two years.

The Artscape Theatre was filled with fans for five nights as they watched dancers aged between 12 and 26 years old from the US, Cuba, Switzerland, Belgium, South Korea, Brazil, Japan, Russia, The People's Republic of China and South Africa compete for top honours in ballet and contemporary categories. Those who couldn't be there lived vicariously through Pat Bromilow-Downing's outstanding photographs uploaded daily on Facebook.



Surprise announcement

A surprise announcement from panellist Melanie Person, co-director of the Alvin Ailey School in New York City, was her award of scholarships to Mthuthuzeli November, 20, from the Cape Academy of Performing Arts (CAPA) in Tokai, Cape Town, and Khanya Mandongana, 17, from the Cape Junior Ballet. November also won the Gold Medal in the senior contemporary section.

The only other South African medallist was Leroy Mokgatle, 14, from Art of Motion in Johannesburg, who not only won hearts with his easy smile and performance quality, but also the Silver and Gold Medals in the scholar classical and contemporary division respectively.

The Chinese, South Korean and Cuban dancers were simply superb, demonstrating exemplary versatility, artistry, musicality and technique at every performance.



In addition to Kim and Person, the panel comprised: Julio Bocca, former principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre and artistic director of the Ballet Nacional Sodre in Uruguay; South African Dawn Weller, former ballerina of PACT Ballet, artistic director of PACT Ballet/The State Theatre Ballet from 1983 to 2000, and now director of Australia's Graduate College of Dance; former ballerina and artistic director of the Korean National Ballet, now artistic director of the Seoul International Dance Competition; Xin Lili, former ballerina, now choreographer and artistic director of the Shanghai Ballet; Oliver Matz, former principal dancer of the Ballet of the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin and acclaimed international guest artist, now the director of Dance Studies and faculty member for classical male dance at the Zurich Dance Academy in Switzerland and Ernst Meisner, artistic director of the junior company of the esteemed Dutch National Ballet in The Netherlands.

Go back to basics!

The panel's feedback to local teachers was clear: Go back to basics! The stronger the foundation, the easier it will be to execute the variations. Weller also encouraged co-operation among all teachers, and a sharing of knowledge by those who travel internationally, so that others can learn from their experience.

The judges encourage less upper-body stiffness; better use of the head, port de bras and footwork; more enjoyment and musicality, and a performance programme more in line with competitors' skill levels. "Most of the kids have astonishing talent; it's absolutely visible and we've been discussing what we can do to support their development and make them stronger for the future. It's about their education and training," said Matz.

From a contemporary dance perspective, Person said there's a need worldwide to define the contemporary dance language. "We're seeing some neoclassical dance, some modern dance - it's difficult to judge. It would be wise for some of the young people to study traditional modern dance techniques such as Graham, Horton, Limon and Taylor, to develop a strong core. Then you can add a contemporary layer.

"We see some dancers going over on their feet and dropping to their knees - there are specific ways that these steps are taught, I'm not sure that younger people understand that - they just do it, and we're afraid they're going to get injured."

Lili had some great advice for dancers who may not have fulfilled expectations. "They should not compare themselves to others, but focus on themselves. I tell that to my students too, especially the younger dancers. They should enjoy the stage and not care too much about the result. This competition is more about considering the dancers with potential, to make a brighter future for them."

**** Dirk Badenhorst presents the Young Ballet Stars of the World Gala performances at Gold Reef City's Lyric Theatre on Wednesday, 25 February and Thursday, 26 February at 8pm. This will showcase the SAIBC 2014 winners and guest artists from South Africa, Cuba and South Korea. Tickets are available from Computicket or 0861 915 8000.**



Back, from left: Seung Yeon Yang, Yuanyuan Zhang, Xu Jing Kun, Fu Yi Yang, Francois Llorente Nunez, Javier Monier, Rafael Quenedit Castro, Ramiro Samon, Mthuthuzeli November and Ga Yeon Jung. Front, from left: Byul Yun, Yu Hang, Leroy Mkgatle, Lou Spichtig, Gabrielle Chock and Julia Conway.

All the SAIBC results

The full list of 2014 winners is as follows (the judges decided not to award certain medals):

Senior Classical - Girls

Gold: R25 000: Ga Yeon Jung, 21, South Korea

Senior Classical - Boys

Gold: R25 000: Ramiro Samon, 20, Cuba

Silver: R15 000: Javier Monier, 21, Cuba

Senior Contemporary - Boys

R15 000: Mthuthuzeli November, 20, South Africa

Junior Classical - Girls

Gold: R20 000: Yuanyuan Zhang, 19, China

Silver: R12 500: Lou Spichtig, 16, Switzerland

Bronze: R7 500: Gabrielle Chock, 16, USA

Junior Contemporary - Girls

R10 000: Yuanyuan Zhang, 19, China

Junior Classical - Boys

Gold: R20 000: Rafael Quenedit Castro, 17, Cuba

Silver: R12 500: Byul Yun, 19, South Korea

Bronze: R7 500: Francois Llorente Nunez, 18, Cuba

Junior Contemporary - Boys

R10 000: Byul Yun, 19, South Korea

Scholar Classical - Girls

Gold: R7 500: Yu Hang, 14, China

Silver: R5 000: Seung Yeon Yang, 15, South Korea

Bronze: R2 500: Julia Conway, 14, USA and Fu Yi Yang, 13, China

Scholar Contemporary - Girls

R5 000: Yu Hang, 14, China

Scholar Classical - Boys

Gold: R7 500: Xu Jing Kun, 13, China

Silver: R5 000: Leroy Mokgatlhe, 14, South Africa

Scholar Contemporary - Boys

Gold: R5 000: Leroy Mokgatlhe, 14, South Africa

Photographs by Pat Bromilow-Downing

ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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