



AWARDS 2025

We present the 2025 list of winners for Italy's finest productions, choreographers, and dancers, as selected by our jury. Alongside these national accolades, we celebrate the achievements of Italian talent on the global stage. And for a broader perspective, our correspondents in Paris and London share their curated highlights of the most inspiring works from the past year.

"Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione" by De Keersmaeker and Mriziga
(© Anne Van Aerschot)

JURY
Maria Luisa Buzzi, Elisabetta Ceron, Azzurra Di Meco, Giuseppe Distefano, Roberto Giambrone, Francesca Pedroni, Sergio Trombetta.

FROM ABROAD
Isabelle Calabre (France)
Maggie Foyer (United Kingdom)



LIST OF WINNERS 2025

BALLET COMPANY PRODUCTION

Marco Spada
Choreography by **Pierre Lacotte**

Rome Opera Ballet

CONTEMPORARY PRODUCTION

Joint winners
Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione

Choreography by **Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker – Radouan Mriziga**
Rosas, A7LA5

My Fierce Ignorant Step
Choreography by **Christos Papadopoulos**

ORIGINAL PROJECT

Último Helecho
Directed by **Nina Laisné**
Choreography and singing by François Chaignaud, Nadia Larcher

PERFORMERS

Navrin Turnbull
Soloist – La Scala Theatre
Georgios Kotsifakis
Freelance

Jacopo Giarda
Freelance
Domenico Di Cristo
Soloist – La Scala Theatre

NEWCOMERS

Giorgia Pasini
Corps de ballet – San Carlo Theatre
Erica Bravini
Freelance

PERFORMERS SPECIAL MENTION

Edward Cooper and Francesco Mascia
Corps de ballet – La Scala Theatre

CHOREOGRAPHER

Saïdo Lehlouh

NEWCOMER CHOREOGRAPHER

Vittoria Girelli

ITALIAN PRODUCTION

Asterode
By and with Marco D'Agostin

ITALIAN PRODUCTION – NEWCOMER

Se domani
Choreography by Elisa Sbaragli

ITALIAN ABROAD

Lorenzo Lelli
Sujet – Paris Opera Ballet
Alessandro Giaquinto
Freelance choreographer

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Antonella Bertoni-Michele Abbondanza

ORIGINAL MUSIC

Maria Arnal
for "La mort i la primavera" and "Afanador"



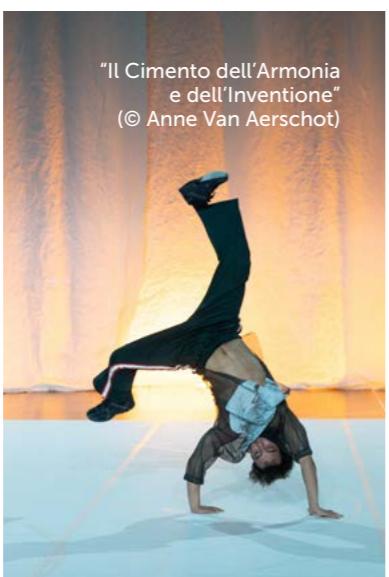
Ballet Production
Marco Spada
Rome Opera Ballet
Chor. Pierre Lacotte

The revival of the ballet *Marco Spada* at the Rome Opera Theatre is a noteworthy undertaking. With great effort on the part of the production team and a good dose of courage from director Eleonora Abbagnato, the mammoth production that Pierre Lacotte created for the Roman ballet company in 1981 was revived in 2025. Employing philological attention and a touch of modernity, they brought Joseph Mazilier's French ballet *Marco Spada ou la fille du bandit* – set to music by Auber (1857) – back to life after more than a century. The restaging of the title involved meticulous work complete with workshops, tailors and stage designers, as well as the on-stage presence of the entire corps de ballet, called upon to master academic virtuosity and pantomime. This was a rare production investment on the Italian scene, which the Theatre tackled with rigour, protecting the integrity of Lacotte's language while ensuring a freshness on stage that is able to speak to today's audience.

Contemporary Production
Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione

Chor. Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Radouan Mriziga

Among the most overused scores, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* find a surprising, virginal vitality in the scenography, choreography and interpretation of *Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione* by Anne Teresa Keersmaeker and Radouan Mriziga. This ninety-



"Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione"
 (© Anne Van Aerschot)

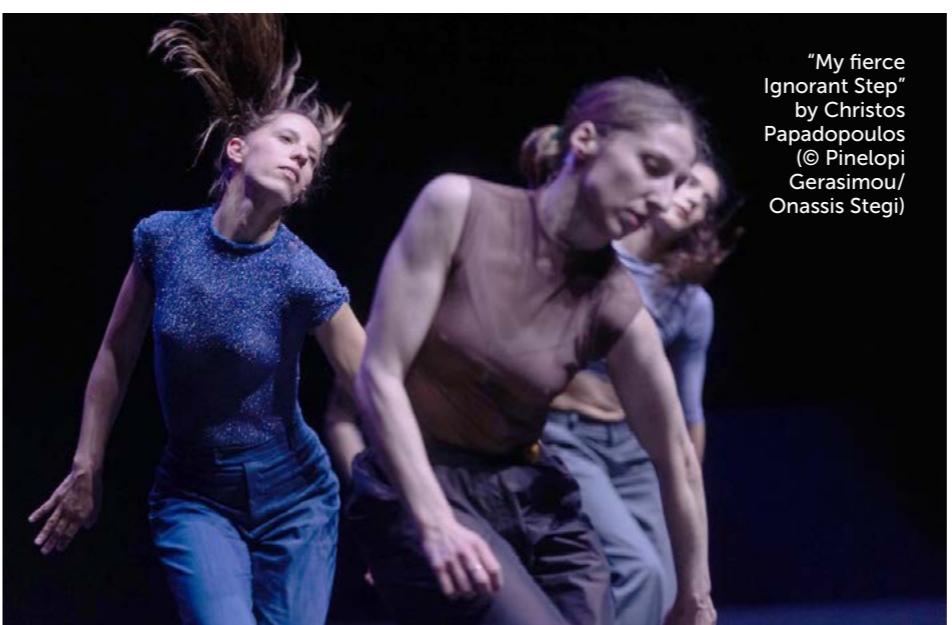
minute production, created, as the two authors explain, in response to today's wars and genocides, reveals in its writing and in the relationship between the bodies and the music a desire for another world. It fills the space with an infinite joy that is as engaging as it is ephemeral, dispersing into the air, step by step, as is the fate of every dance. The four wonderful performers, Boštjan Antončič, Nassim Baddag, Lav Crnčević and José Paulo dos Santos, through the musical recording by Amandine Beyer and Gli Incogniti, take the audience into the flow of time of forgotten seasons. Watching them, so different and yet so cohesive, it seems as if one can hear the wind in their movements, feel the rain, see the fruits reborn from the earth, thanks also to the colours of the cold and the heat evoked by the tubes of light and iron mesh in the background. A piece that leaves one with the desire to stay there, in love with a nature whose extinction we are experiencing.

Contemporary Production

My Fierce Ignorant Step

Chor. Christos Papadopoulos

My Fierce Ignorant Step confirms the Greek choreographer's ability to organise the dancing organism through a continuous, rigorous and vibrant flow like a single, gigantic collective creature. However, Papadopoulos' new piece reveals a fresh impulse: an unprecedented expansion of his writing in which the choreographer allows his language to evolve, transforming a minimal pulsation into a relentless choreographic machine through amplified, layered gestures that testify to creative growth and the desire to seek (and find) new forms of expression. The ten performers, compact yet pulsating with individuality, give life to a choreographic wave of millimetric precision that grows



"My fierce Ignorant Step"
 by Christos Papadopoulos
 (© Pinelopi Gerasimou/Onassis Stegi)

swept away by the rhythms of traditional South American music. A bridge between European and Latin American aesthetics, this captivating and unique work was hosted exclusively in Italy by Oriente Occidente Dance Festival, co-producer together with some thirty of the most important European institutions.

Performers
Navrin Turnbull

Australian performer Navrin Turnbull joined La Scala Theatre Ballet as a Soloist in 2021 and made several excellent debuts in 2025. He started the year in the role of the Prince in Nureyev's version of *The Nutcracker*, in addition to appearing as Siegfried



Navrin Turnbull
 (© Brescia-Amisano)

to a frenetic and luminous finale, rendering the adolescent energy that animates the director's notes, in an interweaving of dance and drama capable of translating a private memory into a collective experience of rare scenic power.

Original Project
Último Helecho

by Nina Laisné, François Chaignaud, Nadia Larcher

Long in search of the "total spectacle", Nina Laisné – director, visual artist and performance creator – has achieved her goal with *Último Helecho*, a work in which the visual universe,



"Último Helecho"
 (© Heinrich Brinkmoller Becker)

and Prince Désiré in the other two titles of Tchaikovsky's triad. He also performed in Nureyev's versions of *Swan Lake* in July and *Sleeping Beauty*, the opening title of the 2025/2026 season. And his technical and interpretative appeal was not limited to the great classics: in Philippe Kratz's *Solitude Sometimes*, Turnbull stood out for his fluidity of movement, in admirable harmony with the style of the piece; in Edward Clug's *Peer Gynt*, he traced the complexity of Ibsen's Gyntian self between

boldness and introspection, and in William Forsythe's magnificent *Blake Works*, he danced with intense dynamism in both the meditative *Prologue* and *Blake Works I*, particularly in *Two Men Down* from James Blake's album *The Colour in Anything*.

Performers

Georgios Kotsifakis

A refined dancer with an uncommon awareness of his own physicality, Georgios Kotsifakis does not simply perform the movement, he inhabits it, listens to it, and renders it charged with meaning. Christos Papadopoulos's performer of choice, he fully embodies his philosophy, characterised by hypnotic, minimalist and almost ritualistic gestures. Kotsifakis reveals a surprising mastery in modulating weight, rhythm and intention: his malleable physicality combines precision of muscular control with an ability to maintain a constant, subdued energy that radiates towards an expressiveness of glances and micro-vibrations. A vital component of a larger performative body, shifting in calculated unison with the



Georgios Kotsifakis
(© Luca Del Pia/
Courtesy LAC)

whole, but above all rigorous and convincing in the solo *Landless*, where he channels, with both lucidity and vulnerability, the condition of the displaced body: every gesture, whether restrained or sudden, becomes a sign of an existence in exile, while his intense, uncompromising stage presence continually awakens layers of poetic resonance within the viewer.

Performers

Jacopo Giarda

Trained at La Scala Theatre, dancer in the Compañía Nacional de Danza in Madrid, then at the Paris Opera Ballet and the Rome Opera Ballet, he has performed solo and



Jacopo Giarda

principal roles for choreographers such as Forsythe, Kylian, Naharin, Ek, Balanchine, Inger, Bausch, León/Lightfoot and McGregor. In 2019, he founded BEYONDANCE. While continuing to collaborate with the Rome Opera Ballet for part of the season, from 2023 he has chosen to pursue his career as an independent artist, taking part in various projects in Italy and abroad and collaborating with contemporary choreographers who have also created works for him. Over the past year, he has asserted his presence in a number of creations, including Leon/Lightfoot's *Subject To Change*, partnered with Rebecca Bianchi,

Bausch's *Le sacre du printemps*, and Vittoria Girelli's *In Esisto*, standing out for the quality of his poetic gesture. A versatile dancer with plastic and decisive movements, elegance and virility, he has always sought a sensitive, profound and introspective dimension that gives meaning and depth to movement, distinguishing himself for the intensity of his performance and his enquiring spirit.

Performers

Domenico Di Cristo

He earns our recognition for the commanding presence and interpretative depth that have consistently defined his work since his appointment as Soloist of the



Domenico Di Cristo

La Scala Theatre Ballet in 2021. His stand-out performances over the years include the Gypsy in Nureyev's *Don Quixote*, Benvolio in MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet*, and the male lead in Amedeo Amodio's *L'Après-midi d'un faune* in the 2023 edition of the *Fracci Gala*. In 2025, he reprised Philippe Kratz's *Solitude Sometimes*, performing with stylistic precision, and gave convincing performances as Brick in *Dances at a Gathering* and Shy Boy in Jerome Robbins' *The Concert*. He further distinguished himself in William Forsythe's *Prologue*, a creation for which he was chosen for the 2023 debut.



Erica Bravini

Newcomer Performers

Erica Bravini

Born in 1997, a dancer and performer, she trained at the Accademia Nazionale di Danza and was part of Guilherme Botelho's Alias in Geneva from 2017 to 2021. Since 2020 she has been a dancer for the productions of Aldes/Roberto Castello, collaborating with choreographers such as Adriana Borriello, Dalila Belaza, performer-choreographer Michael Incarbone, and most recently, Daniele Ninarello. With her physicality and strong yet ethereal – almost adolescent – looks, Bravini possesses magnetic stage presence and disruptive movement that seems to melt naturally, with clarity and power. She has distinguished herself this year across a variety of creations, including Castello's *Il sesso degli angeli*, Michael Incarbone's *Fallen Angels* and *Finché ci trema il cuore*, *Un peu pour mon cœur* by Dalila Belaza and *Rise* by Ninarello, confirming artistic quality and rigorous technique – both in constant transformation.

Newcomer Performers

Giorgia Pasini

Solid technique, combined with remarkable communicative verve and sensitivity, make Giorgia



Giorgia Pasini

Pasini a young performer to watch. After graduating from the La Scala Academy Ballet School in 2019 and spending two seasons at La Scala, she joined the Corps de Ballet of the San Carlo Theatre in Naples, directed by Clotilde Vayer, in 2021. Her career is on the rise. Among the titles in which she has stood out in recent seasons are MacMillan's *Concerto*, Nureyev's *Don Quixote* (Cupid) and *Raymonda* (Clemence), Jerome Robbins' *In the Night*, the variation *La Serenade* from Lifar's *Suite en Blanc*, which she will perform again in 2025, and the role of Juliet in Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* (2024). She earns this accolade for her excellent performance in John Cranko's *Onegin*, playing a superb Olga with multifaceted versatility as she shifts between sentimentality and coquetry to a dramatic epilogue, in addition to her reprisal of the role of Clara/Sugar Plum Fairy in Simone Valastro's *The Nutcracker*.

Special Mention

Edward Cooper

A special mention for his display of technique and allure in the pas de trois and the tarantella in the Nureyev *Swan Lake*, the *Pastorale* in *Nutcracker*, the *Balanchine/Robbins triple bill*, as well as the pas de trois in Lacotte's *Paquita* and *Blake Works* by William

Forsythe. Edward Cooper joined La Scala Theatre Ballet in 2023 after training in his homeland of Australia and three years of training at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy (2016-2019).



Edward Cooper

Special Mention

Francesco Mascia

A special mention to Francesco Mascia, a dancer with La Scala Theatre Ballet, for his dazzling, dynamic technique and acting skills, as seen in William Forsythe's *Blake Works*, which returned to the Piermarini's stage last November.



Francesco Mascia



Saido Lehlouh
(© Jerome Bonnet)

Choreographer **Saido Lehlouh**

Saido Lehlouh (AKA Darwin) emerged onto the Parisian b-boying scene in the late 1990s, establishing a brand new vision of urban dance. He gained prominence in 2018 with his piece *Wild Cat*, which shows off his distinctive, feline, refined style. Since then, he has focused on the authenticity of movement sought in every performer through an authentic relationship with one's own body and the world; in his latest work *Témoin*, seen at Torinodanza Festival 2025, Lehlouh presents a forthright style of movement that seeks answers in reciprocity, rather than in the virtuosity of freestyle. What emerges is a self-taught vocabulary of seductive subtlety and captivating energy, a mirror of contemporary multiethnic society, which transforms and adapts. Co-director of the Fair-e collective and head of the Centre Chorégraphique National de Rennes et de Bretagne since 2019, it is now clear that he has given fresh momentum to the future aesthetics of hip hop.

Newcomer Choreographer **Vittoria Girelli**

With her clarity of vision and depth of thought, Vittoria Girelli stands out as one of the most original choreographic voices to

have emerged in 2025. Trained in Milan, London and Stuttgart, Girelli embraces a broad-ranging artistic sensibility rooted in nature, literature and the visual arts, and has displayed a balance between technical rigour and lyrical imagination. As a Demi-Soloist at the Stuttgart Ballet, Girelli managed to transform her dual identity as performer and dancemaker into a rich impetus for discovery. In the works she has created, from Stuttgart to Zurich and Trier, the choreographer has demonstrated a clear personal style, an abstract narration which never forgoes dramaturgy, and a dance that interacts with other artistic languages. Particularly in *In Esisto*, presented at the Rome Opera Theatre in 2025, she showed a work on the dialectics between presence and metamorphosis, rendered through a stripped-back, impactful physical vocabulary sculpted in light, with an expansive, contemporary yet poetic feel.

Vittoria Girelli



Italian Production **Asteroid**

Chor. **Marco D'Agostin**

With *Asteroid*, Marco D'Agostin develops a complex reflection on the crisis of our time in the captivating format of a one-man-show. This ironic, engaging theatrical game unfolds through autobiography and storytelling, including spoken word, song, dance, rhythms and the illusions of a musical. Treading the line between truth



Marco D'Agostin
(© Masiar Pasquali)

and fiction, D'Agostin explores in equal measure the extinction of the dinosaurs and our fragility, in the face of the impenetrable logic of events and the mystery of death. Thanks to the ingenious yet pared-back set and lighting design, and his transformational abilities, D'Agostin reminds us that stories, theatre and dance all help us to live.

Italian Production - Newcomer Choreographer

Se domani

Chor. **Elisa Sbaragli**

Elisa Sbaragli's *Se domani* ('If tomorrow') is a revelation. The Tuscan choreographer, in her second production after the site-specific solo *Mirada*, has found a way to express, through forty minutes of mesmerising dance, her research on the body as a medium that listens to the space and to the other. She does so by narrating contemporary Western society, the overblown ego of the modern age and its all too often one-way direction of travel.



"Se domani"

She is helped by two excellent dancers, Alice Raffaelli and Lorenzo De Simone: the pair dance with every inch of their bodies and faces, first expressing the cult of individualism and existential myopia, and then the search for the other. This psychological journey translates into the spatial lines, from the rectilinear solo to new geometries (semi-circle and circle), and in the gestures, which after hysterical, megalomaniac jerkiness, find calm and lyricism in an embrace.

Italian Abroad **Lorenzo Lelli**

With elegant lines and dazzling technique, Lorenzo Lelli shows an imposing stage presence and the talent of a young promise on the prestigious Palais Garnier stage with the Paris Opera Ballet, where he is now a newly promoted Sujet. But he has also danced on several



Lorenzo Lelli
(© Maria-Helena Buckley)

occasions as a guest in Italy: at the age of twenty-two, he performed at the Arcimboldi when Roberto Bolle cast him in his Bolle&Friends gala; paired with Hortense Millet-Maurin (Sugar Plum Fairy), he took on the role of the Cavalier in *The Nutcracker* by Edi Blloshmi with the National Ballet of Tirana (Italian tour). After moving to Paris in 2023, newly graduated from La Scala Ballet School, he was promoted to Coryphée in 2024 through the internal competition. Alongside a

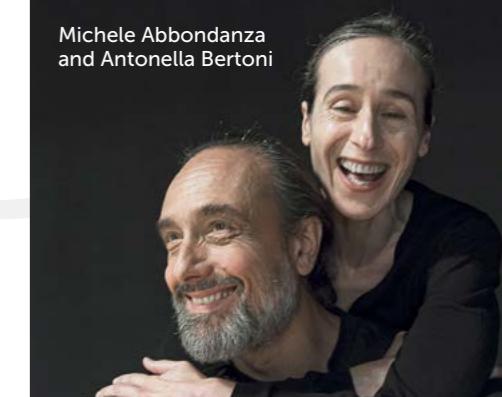
distinguished performance of Prince Désiré in Nureyev's *Sleeping Beauty*, last season he was also impressive in the Pas de trois from Lacotte's *Paquita* and the Peasant Pas de deux in Coralli-Perrot's *Giselle*.

Lifetime Achievement **Michele Abbondanza/** **Antonella Bertoni**

Michele Abbondanza and Antonella Bertoni have been stimulating Italian contemporary dance with beauty and substance for more than three decades. They both had productive experiences with masters of the 20th-century scene such as Alwin Nikolais and Carolyn Carlson; and in 1984 Abbondanza co-founded the Sosta Palmizi collective. Together, the pair have crafted a body of work which lays bare, with multi-faceted perspicacity, what moves human beings. Since *Terramara* way back in 1991, the story of a couple played out on stage among orange-filled baskets, a whole host of titles have made the Abbondanza and Bertoni company – resident at the Teatro alla Cartiera in Rovereto since



Michele Abbondanza
and Antonella Bertoni



2005 – a hub for creation and training. Just a few of the long list: *Romanzo d'infanzia* (1997), the two trilogies *Ho male all'altro*, inspired by Greek tragedy, and *Poiesis* (2017-2019), which hinged upon the relationship with music. It opens with the touching female trio, previously a D&D Prize winner, *La morte e la fanciulla* set to music by Schubert, followed by *Erectus*, set to jazz by Charles Mingus, and *Pelléas et Mélisande* with an Arnold Schönberg score. Their more recent works explore identity, with striking titles like *Femina* and *Viro*: group creations interspersed over the years with

vibrant solos such as *Try* and *C'è vita su Venere* with Antonella Bertoni, who also created the dazzling micro-dance *Terra piccola* (2025) for Aterballetto. Our 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award goes, unanimously, to these two artists.

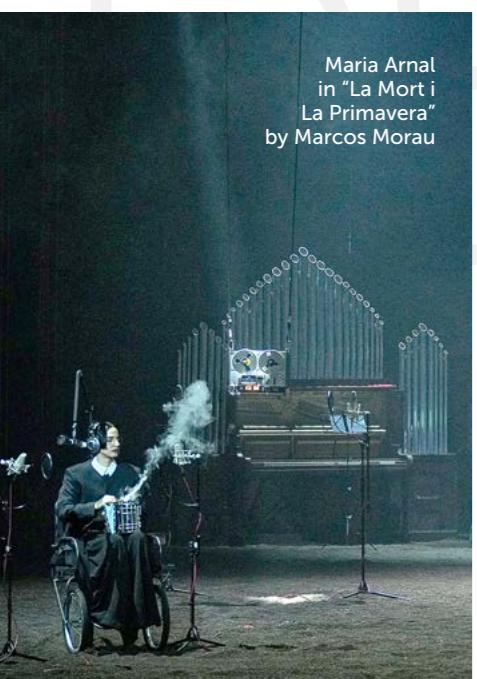
Original Score

Maria Arnal

for "La mort i la primavera" and "Afanador"

The talented Catalan artist Maria Arnal manages to combine the musical and singing tradition of her nation with the sounds and languages of the present, blending polyphony, electronica and Artificial Intelligence. A singer, composer and performer, Arnal collaborates with a range of institutions and artists. In 2025, she took part in the Marcos

Maria Arnal
in "La Mort i
La Primavera"
by Marcos Morau



Morau pieces *La mort i la primavera* and *Afanador*, helping to draw out their visionary element and intense power with her incredibly expressive voice and charismatic stage presence.

THE BEST OF

France

The suspense hanging over the French dance world lingered until the summer. Who would take over from Thierry Malandain at the helm of the Centre Chorégraphique National of Biarritz on 1 January 2027? After a series of possible candidates, including Benjamin Millepied and Alexander Ekman, the job eventually went to Martin Harriague from Bayonne. So, it is now certain that *Minuit et demi ou le cœur mystérieux*, created in May in San Sebastian (Spain) will be Malandain's final work for the ballet that bears his name. And this delicate elegy, set to the little-known *Mélodies* by Camille Saint-Saëns, is undoubtedly the finest neo-classical success of the year. As for new talents, a mention should go to the achievements of the charismatic dancer at the Paris Opera, Lorenzo Lelli, who danced the role of Prince Désiré in the Nureyev *Sleeping Beauty* in May to universal acclaim. And it was also the Paris Opera that brought, at the last minute on 2 December, the most exciting contemporary new work, with *Drift Wood* by Imre and Marne Van Opstal, closing the appropriately-named *Contrasts* programme. i.c.

United Kingdom

More than most European countries, dance performances in the UK tend to be London centric. The Royal Ballet dominates the ballet scene with well over 100 performances on the main stage each season and the busy Linbury studio theatre used productively for visiting companies and also for choreographic evenings and youth performances. Top of the list was Natalia Osipova dancing Tatiana in Cranko's *Onegin* at the Royal Opera House. She developed the character over the three acts from a bookish girl to a mature woman of formidable emotion building to a heartrending climax, supported by Lukas B. Brændsrød making a memorable debut as Onegin. The

final new Royal Ballet production of the year was *Perspectives* featuring Justin Peck's *Everywhere We Go*: this is the first Peck ballet in the company's repertoire and a welcome addition. Also memorable was the evening at the Linbury Theatre, a venue for Joburg Ballet who brought Dada Masilo's last ballet, *Salome*, to London. Masilo, who died so tragically young, was always the vibrant centre of her ballets and I waited with some trepidation to see the work. However, Latoya Mokoena proved a dancer of striking presence in the title role of *Salomé*. It is a one act ballet that plunges straight into a maelstrom of frenzied movement where Jokanaan's saintliness is no match for vice and evil. London City Ballet is finding its niche featuring interesting works and taking ballet out of the city centres. Jerome Robbins' *Quiet City* was a welcome revival of a work that soared to spiritual heights and gave a powerful central role to Alejandro Virelles. Alexei Ratmansky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* also proved a neat fit for the small company. Among the dancers who most impressed were Jonathan Goddard (as Theseus) and Tommy Franzén (Dionysus/Minotaur) in Kim Brandstrup's *Minotaur*, and the two very romantic Giselles performed by Erina Takahashi (English National Ballet in Mary Skeaping's production) and Yui Yonezawa (National Ballet of Japan at the Coliseum, performing in the UK for the first time). Russell Maliphant's solo piece *In a Landscape*, seen at the Coronet (the company inexplicably lost its 2025 Arts Council funding), was a work of austere beauty, with enchanting, sculpted forms flowing through shadow and light. Marc Brew and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's extraordinary and moving *Accident/a Life* was also a remarkable and moving work: a story of resilience beginning with the accident that left the talented dancer Brew paraplegic. Certainly among the best performers of the year is Aakash Odedra in his kathak solo, *Songs of the Bulbul*. m.f. •

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