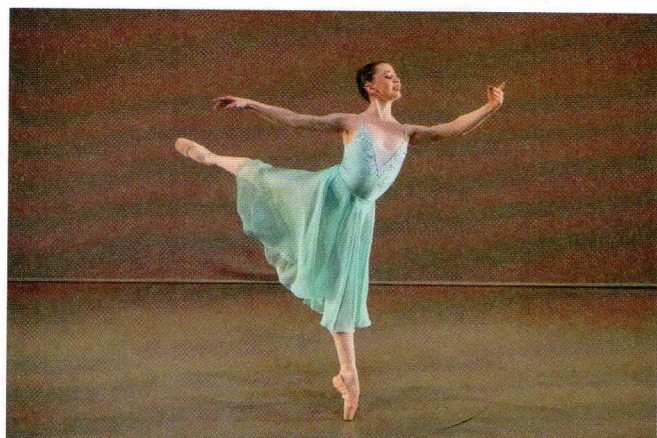




Education

Auditions, performances, funding, summer schools and awards



GradPro

Held in the studio theatre at Elmhurst Ballet School on May 15, the first GradPro National Showcase proved a fine evening of dance. Created by Julie Bowers, CEO at bbodance, and Brandon Lawrence, principal dancer with Birmingham Royal Ballet, the project aims to address some of the difficulty graduates have in being seen by companies and directors – a problem that the pandemic has only heightened.

Although there was a competitive element, in that awards were made to the top four dancers as selected by judges Dominic Antonucci, Kenneth Tindall and Gail Monahan, GradPro is very much more about giving dancers encouragement and the chance to showcase their talents. From my seat in the audience, the evening certainly had a friendly feel.

The showcase featured 14 dancers selected at four regional events in class centre work and two solos. For their repertoire solo they had a completely free choice, although most stuck with familiar variations from the classics. Their second solo could be choreographed by or for them, and could be as classical or contemporary

Above: English National Ballet School's Paige McElligott, winner of the Gail Monahan Award at bbodance's GradPro. She is dancing a solo from Act I of *Giselle*.

as they wished. Unusually, but pleasingly, most opted for the former.

The evening's top Gail Monahan Award was deservedly taken by Paige McElligott from English National Ballet School. Her variation from Act I of *Giselle* was strong and superbly controlled as she demonstrated an ability to find time in the music; always a sign of a good dancer. Her choreographed

solo, *Season*, a dance imbued with joyfulness and a springtime feel, was equally impressive.

The second place London Ballet Circle Award went to Poppy Frankel, now training with Vanessa Palmer, who gave a particularly perky rendition of the Pizzicato Polka from *Sylvia*, before showing some beautiful use of épaulement in her very classical *Gnossienne No 3*.

The other two awards went to Elmhurst's Olivia Chang-Clarke and Mackenzie Jacob. Chang-Clarke gave a near-perfect and very musical performance of a *Cinderella* variation, before impressing again in a solo from her own ensemble work, *Tetris*. The tall Jacob cut an elegant figure in his solo as Siegfried from *Swan Lake*.

Elsewhere, two of the more unusual repertoire variations stood out in particular. Elizabeth Griffiths showed lots of sharpness and attack in a solo from William Forsythe's *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, while Elena Scott captured brilliantly the highly-

charged, expressionistic choreography of Alberto Alonso's *Carmen Suite*. It really did feel like she was talking to the audience.

The event was filmed and is available to company directors, a number of whom I understand have already requested copies. While the long-term future for GradPro is uncertain, Bowers and Lawrence told me it will definitely return in 2023.

DAVID MEAD

Ballet Central

Ballet students across the world have had a very tough time since the pandemic began in 2020. They've suffered huge disruption to their training, periods of lockdown when the kitchen sink has doubled as a ballet barre, illness and isolation – all at a crucial time in their development and preparation for a professional career. This year's Central School of Ballet graduates, Ballet Central, under the direction of Kate Coyne, may have

Below: Ballet Central in *Unbound*.

