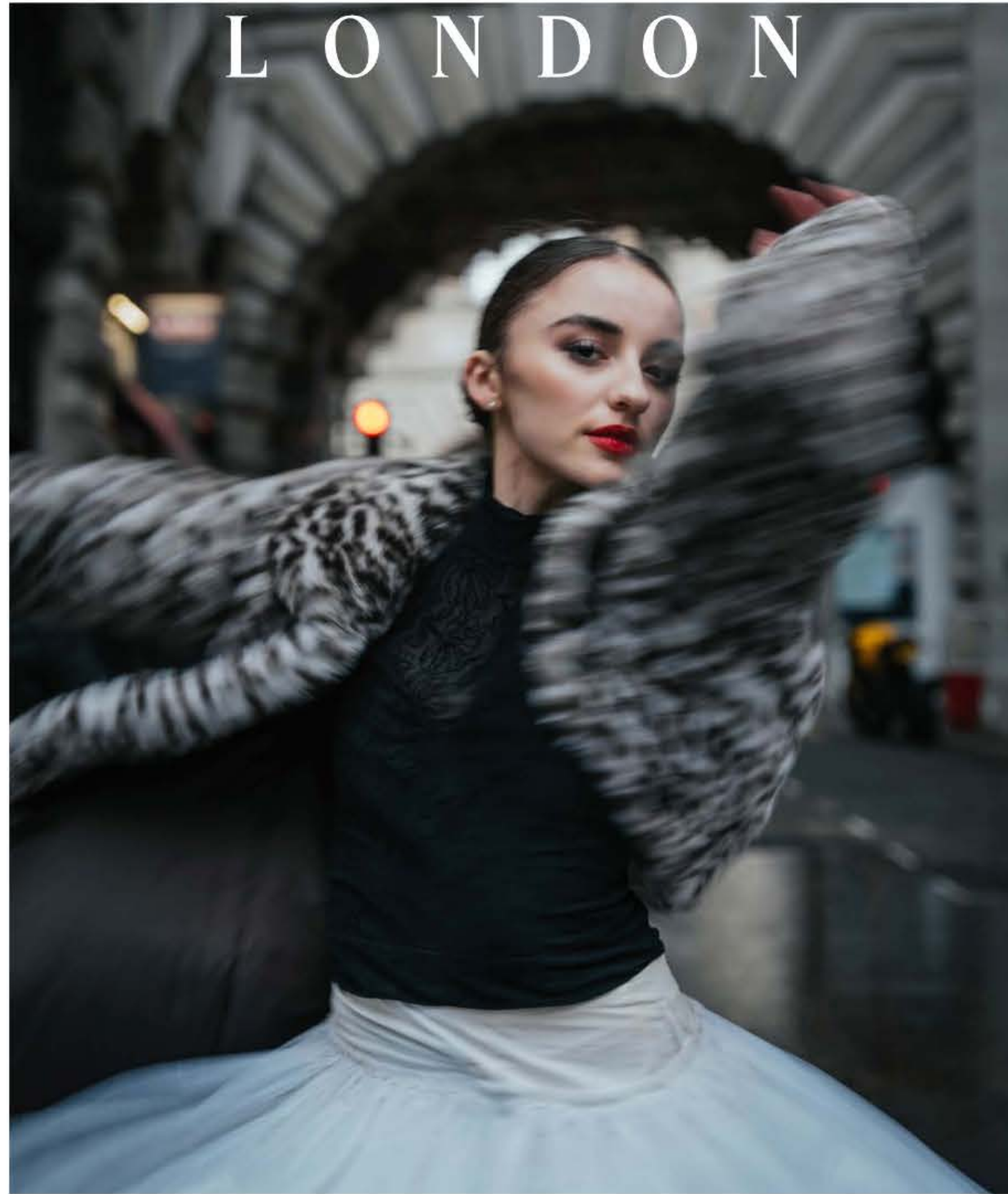


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This image and opposite
Photographer: Carlos Quezada
Dancers: YAGP & Trinity Laban
Gala de Danza, London, 2025



Promotion



A Collaborative Effort

By connecting local talent with world-class performers, an international dance festival aims to create cultural connections across artistic divides

In partnership with **Gala de Danza**

'IS IT DANCE? Is it theatre? Or is it just life? Love. Freedom. Struggle. Longing. Joy. Despair. Reunion. Beauty. Strength.' So asks the seminal 2011 documentary *Pina*. Gorgeously shot and universally acclaimed, the film explores the work of the late German dancer and choreographer, Pina Bausch. During the 1970s, Bausch revolutionised modern dance by blending movement, music, song and striking visual imagery. Bausch believed that dance had the power to improve our lives. Half a century later, sharing the same belief, Christina Lyon, a former dancer with American Ballet Theatre, established Gala de Danza as a means of bringing the benefits of moving art to the wider world.

Lyon, who has performed as a guest artist with the English National Ballet, was on holiday in Mexico in 2011 when the idea for Gala de Danza (Festival of Dance) began to emerge. Stumbling across a rudimentary local dance school, Lyon volunteered to teach. The school had uneven floorboards and no mirrors. Yet in the passion,

and potential, of the children that danced there, Lyon found inspiration. "There was one beautiful young girl in particular, Mariana Carrillo," recalls Lyon. "She had never seen live performing arts – I started the gala for her."

Gala de Danza was officially launched two years later in the same city; Lyon having reached out to her network of international dancers and invited them to perform in Mexico. The model of the event – combining different types of leading dancers from around the world with local up-and-coming performers – proved a huge success, spawning the concept behind the touring festival. "Every time we create a new edition of Gala," says Lyon, "the goal is the same: to build something that has never existed before, not just for the audience, but for the artists themselves."

Summer 2025 saw Gala de Danza land in London for the first time. Like those before it, the gala was a multidisciplinary event featuring 21 pieces curated by Lyon across a range of genres – classical ballet, ballroom, contemporary, opera and Latin among them. Dancers >



Melissa Hamilton
& Vsevolod Maievskiy
©Carlos Quezada

from The Royal Ballet, New York City Ballet and Paris Opera Ballet all featured in the show, which took place in Central Hall Westminster, while young artists from Youth America Grand Prix and Trinity Laban made world premieres.

"Performing at Gala de Danza was special because it gave me the chance to connect with the audience in a unique and personal way," says Viola Pantuso, a soloist at The Royal Ballet. "It's rare to share the stage with such a diverse cast of artists from so many different forms, and in such a beautiful setting." In Central Hall Westminster, Pantuso performed the female role in the *pas de deux* from *The Flames of Paris*, alongside partner Shale Wagman of the Paris Opera Ballet.

Other highlights of the 2025 programme included performances by The Royal Ballet Principals Francesca Hayward, Melissa Hamilton and Cesar Corrales, as well as New York City Ballet's Emma Von Enck and English National Ballet's Vsevolod Maievskiy. The big-name stars

performed new and much-loved works by celebrated choreographers Juliano Nunes and Jade Hale-Christofi.

"The performance didn't just feel like a show, but a celebration of art and an opportunity to connect with new artists outside of my usual environment," says Pantuso. "I felt energised by what Gala de Danza created. Dance allows me to express things that words can't always capture. On stage, I can channel emotions that we often have to hold back or filter in daily life. In that moment, nothing needs to be contained. I can be completely honest. My hope is that this honesty reaches others and resonates with them."

Beyond ballet, Gala de Danza London featured contemporary works by Rambert, excerpts from Sadeck Berrabah's *Murmuration*, and performances by Latin Ballroom champions Anton Sboev and Patrizia Ranis. There was music, too, notably by Polish countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński; America's Got Talent semi-finalist, guitarist and composer, Marcin; saxophonist Valentin Kovalev; and William Close, whose giant harp has made him a Guinness World Record holder.

"Bringing Gala de Danza to London was one of the most creatively fulfilling and emotionally powerful journeys of my career," says Lyon. "The response to the show was overwhelmingly positive and deeply moving. To see performers from the UK, Mexico, Ukraine, Brazil, the US and beyond share a stage and a vision is a reminder of what can happen when borders dissolve and art takes the lead."

Another dancer that graced the London stage was Andres Zuniga. Like Mariana Carrillo, Zuniga was one of the young performers Lyon had first met in Mexico. Whereas Carrillo went on to study at the University of Southern California's Glorja Kaufman School of Dance – before appearing at subsequent Gala de Danzas in Mexico – Zuniga is currently a member of New York City Ballet's corps de ballet.

"It is not about being the biggest gala in the world," says Lyon, "simply the best." So where can we expect the festival to head next? "That will be shaped by the right combination of new commissions, bold collaborations, and transformative partnerships," says the Artistic Director and founder. "Wherever we go we must honour Gala's spirit of creative risk and cultural connection – London will be a hard act to follow, but there are exciting paths ahead!"

galadedanza.com



Francesca Hayward
performing *Swan Lake*
©Charlie Dailey

Francesca Hayward

The Royal Ballet Principal on music, misconceptions and making ballet look easy

Interview by Richard Brown

"IT'S VERY HARD to express what I'm feeling when I dance. It's difficult to put into words, but I hope the audience feels it too, that's what I am aiming for." Having begun training at The Royal Ballet School aged 11, Francesca Hayward was promoted to Principal Dancer aged just 24. She has since starred in the musical film *Cats*, ballet feature film *Romeo and Juliet: Beyond Words*, and was one of 15 women selected to appear on the cover of the September 2019 issue of British *Vogue*, guest edited by Meghan, Duchess of Sussex. Fresh from performing the final *pas de deux* from The Royal Ballet's *Onegin* at Gala de Danza, Hayward discusses favourite venues and life away from dancing.

RICHARD BROWN You grew up in West Sussex, but where's home for you now?

FRANCESCA HAYWARD I live in Soho, close to the Royal Opera House.

RB How much travel does life as a principal ballerina involve?

FH This summer I went to Korea. Before then, Shanghai and Taiwan. Japan is starting to feel like a second home.

RB You recently performed as part of Gala de Danza's London dance festival. What drew you to the Gala?

FH I have a lovely friendship with Christina [the founder]. I totally trust her – whatever she does, I'll always be involved in. She chose a really unusual venue and

the piece we performed is rarely seen in gala format.

RB What made the show special to you?

FH The range of artists was very unusual. We had dancers of all kinds of styles, and singers and musicians of all ages. It felt very inclusive.

RB Which are your favourite venues in which to perform?

FH The Royal Opera House is one of the most beautiful, and I'm not just saying it because it is my home theatre. Another one is the Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo. For the past 50 years or so, everyone that's danced there has signed their name on a concrete wall – so you can see some very famous names. >

RB What do you think is the biggest misconception about ballet?

FH When people see ballet up close, I think they can be surprised how much effort actually goes into it. Some people think we just wear pink dresses and waft about. They don't realise we need the physical strength of an athlete – and that we have to disguise the effort we put in!

RB What does dancing allow you to express that day-to-day life does not?

FH The Japanese have words that don't exist in English. There will be an emotion you can't quite put your finger on, and they'll have a word for it. It's very hard to express how I sometimes feel, but I hope when someone's watching me dance, they have the same feeling. It's almost like you don't need to put it into words – you can understand the feeling while you're watching it. I think that's a very powerful thing.

RB What types of music or dance are you into that might surprise people?

FH I like a lot of old rock 'n' roll, and The Stone Roses.

RB How has ballet shaped you off stage?

FH It's taught me to be disciplined. To be professional. You've got to be equipped for every situation; it's not just a physical test. Your emotions need to be in check, dealing with the stress and the pressure and the nerves. I don't rely on anyone else.

RB Do you have a favourite role you've danced that felt like it was made for you?

FH I do love the dramatic ones – that's what drew me to ballet. It wasn't just the movement, it was also the music, the way to tell a story.

There's a very dramatic ballet called *Manon* in which the female lead jumps and dies mid-air. You get thrown into a flip with your partner, and die in the air. When you come down, the music crashes, and you're dead. It's very dramatic – I think that's amazing.

RB What takes up most of your time outside of dancing?

FH Probably the only other thing I feel super passionate about is fashion. The only other exercise I do is shopping!

RB Which is your favourite city for a weekend away?

FH I only went to Paris for the first time about six years ago. Now I love getting the train there – it feels very magical. In the summer, I love Barcelona.

RB Favourite London restaurant?

FH There are lots around me that I haven't tried. I really want to try this Persian one called Berenjok.

RB Which recent film or television series has had an effect on you?

FH I wouldn't say it's changed my life, but I'm a big *Ozark* fan. I also keep getting sucked into these strange alien things.

RB Same question, but for books?

FH The last one I remember thinking about for a long time after was *To Paradise* by Hanya Yanagihara.

RB What's next in the diary?

FH It's London Fashion Week, so some shows and a few afterparties – although it's usually a miracle if I can make them! ■



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This page and opposite
Francesca Hayward
& Cesar Corrales
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