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**VITACCA VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FOR DANCE'S CRISTIAN PONDER WINS
RARE GRAND PRIX AWARD AT YOUTH AMERICA GRAND PRIX 2023**

Vitacca Dance Wins Youth America Grand Prix Houston Outstanding School 2023



MARCH 3, 2023: HOUSTON, TEXAS – Vitacca Vocational School for Dance, Houston and Artistic Director + Founder Kelly Ann Vitacca are proud to announce dancer Cristian Ponder (16) was awarded Grand Prix Dancer at the prestigious International Ballet Competition Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP) Houston held February 16-19, 2023 at the Cullen Performance Hall. YAGP is the world's largest global network of dance. The Grand Prix award is only awarded to dancers who display excellence in both classical and contemporary dance. Mr. Ponder's win demonstrates Vitacca Dance's strong and versatile Men's Program. Vitacca School for Dance was also awarded Outstanding School in 2023 for the seventh year running.

"I am in my fourth year of the men's program and studio company at Vitacca School for Dance. Being in this program has helped me to develop a greater appreciation not just for dance, but for artistry. To embrace dance as athleticism and art is to understand its truth. It's exactly why I have enjoyed training at Vitacca because the vision to build artists aligns significantly with mine. This year, I was entrusted with creating my own contemporary piece—a goal I was privileged to accomplish," comments Mr. Ponder on his experience dancing with Vitacca.

SUPERIOR TRAINING IN DANCE EDUCATION
Vitacca Vocational School For Dance, Houston and The Woodlands
www.VitaccaDance.com



On winning the Grand Prix award Mr. Ponder states, “Most people don’t realize the sacrifices dancers make on their physical health and lifestyle. I stopped going to a brick-and-mortar school, I traded school dances for dance performances, competitive sports for pre-professional ballet training, and sleeping in with extra conditioning. But I never wanted a normal childhood, I’ve always just wanted to dance. Winning the Grand Prix offered respite to those sacrifices, anchoring me in with recognition while still feeling the heaviness of great humility. It’s not the time to say, “Oh, I’ve arrived,” rather “I have to keep working harder.””

“The Grand Prix award is rarely awarded at YAGP. For Cristian to win in Houston as a Houston grown aspiring ballet dancer is truly beautiful and even more meaningful,” remarks Ms. Vitacca. “Our Men’s Program is a staple of Vitacca Dance and this award reflects the strong and versatile program we have built over the years.”

Vitacca Vocational School for Dance is also proud to share the many top honors awarded at the 2023 YAGP Houston:

OUTSTANDING SCHOOL AWARD

Vitacca Vocational School for Dance

SENIOR AGE DIVISION

Placement	Performers	Age
GRAND PRIX	Cristian Ponder	16

CLASSICAL DANCE CATEGORY - WOMEN

Placement	Performers	Age
1	Amira Hogan	16
2 (TIE)	Isabella Shook	15

CLASSICAL DANCE CATEGORY TOP 24 - WOMEN

Nine students placed in the Top 24.

Alana Benton, Amira Hogan, Corina Wilson, Isabella Shook, Katya Cassidy, Kyra Wentzlaff, Larissa Yakunovich, Sophia Sparrow, Valeria Olivares

CLASSICAL DANCE CATEGORY – MEN

Placement	Performers	Age
1	Connor Blank	15

CONTEMPORARY DANCE CATEGORY - WOMEN

Placement	Performers	Age
2	Alana Benton	17



CONTEMPORARY DANCE CATEGORY TOP 24

Five students placed in the Top 24.

Alana Benton, Amira Hogan, Isabella Shook, Katya Cassidy, Taryn Elliott

CONTEMPORARY DANCE CATEGORY - MEN

Placement	Performers	Age
3 (TIE)	Connor Blank	15

JUNIOR AGE DIVISION

CLASSICAL DANCE CATEGORY - WOMEN

Placement	Performers	Age
1	Aubrey Daniels	13
3 (TIE)	Kinley Brewer	13

CLASSICAL DANCE CATEGORY TOP 24 - WOMEN

Four students placed in the Top 24.

Abby Lenker, Amaris Ponder, Aubrey Daniels, Kinley Brewer

CLASSICAL DANCE CATEGORY – MEN

Placement	Performers	Age
2	Joshua Jones	13
3	Julian Gomez	14

CONTEMPORARY DANCE CATEGORY – WOMEN

Placement	Performers	Age
1	Abby Lenker	14

CONTEMPORARY DANCE CATEGORY TOP 24 – MEN AND WOMEN

Five students placed in the Top 24.

Amaris Ponder, Aubrey Daniels, Julian Gomez, Kinley Brewer, Sarah Prewitt

PRE-COMPETITIVE AGE DIVISION

CLASSICAL DANCE CATEGORY TOP 12 – MEN AND WOMEN

Melody Zhang

CONTEMPORARY DANCE CATEGORY TOP 12 – MEN AND WOMEN

Isla Nicholas and Melody Zhang



VITACCA

VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FOR DANCE

ENSEMBLES

PAS DE DEUX

Placement	Performers	Piece
1	Cristian Ponder & Isabella Shook	Grand Pas Classique Pas De Deux

LARGE ENSEMBLES

1st Place – ALL Ensembles

Vitacca School for Dance is a Youth America Grand Prix Houston Outstanding School for the seventh year 2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2017, 2016. For more information on Vitacca School for Dance visit www.VitaccaDance.com.

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