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## Young dancer's scholarship a triumph for SA and his dance school

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Leroy Mokgatle. Picture: PAT BROMILOW-DOWNING

SOUTH African ballet dancer Leroy Mokgatle's scholarship at the Prix de Lausanne international ballet competition was "great for SA, not just the school", said Art of Motion SA dance school director Esme Harris on Tuesday.

Mr Mokgatle arrived back in SA on Tuesday.

"It's wonderful for SA, SA hasn't had this amount of media attention, not in absolute, absolute years," said Harris. "It's tremendous, we have so much talent and ability, in choreography, teaching and our students, but we've been almost pessimistic for a long time. The whole art world needed this pick up."

Harris said she could not yet disclose the European dance school Mr Mokgatle, 16, had chosen because the paperwork had not been finalised.

Mokgatle has an invitation from the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre in New York, but can only take this up once he has completed his schooling. "He had decided, he's known for a while," she said of the dance academy Mokgatle wants to attend. Mokgatle has just begun his matric year.

"His reaction was, 'I can't believe it,' Leroy never anticipates recognition, he just goes onto the stage and literally leaves what he has there," said Harris of his being awarded the scholarship.

Mokgatle was awarded one of several scholarships on offer at the competition, and the Audience Award. This is the second time in the competition's 44-year history that a South African has been awarded a scholarship. The scholarship allows him to study at one of 66 Prix de Lausanne partner schools and companies across the world.

Mokgatle, who has no parents but does have a dedicated and very encouraging extended family, already has several prizes to his name. These include gold at the Genée International Ballet Competition in London last September, where he also won the Margot Fonteyn Audience Award; and bronze in the junior male category in the 2014 American Grand Prix New York finals.

Harris said there were limited job prospects for young dancers in SA, and she tried to get them international experience and exposure that "can take them into a career overseas".

"It's sad, we are losing excellent dancers for South African audiences," she said.

Mokgatle was an "ideal role model" for South Africans, said Harris. "See what can be done? See what can be achieved, whatever your circumstances, if you just buckle down and work your — sorry — arse off."

Mokgatle, who boards at the school, often had to be berated for continuing to dance after classes were over and letting his dinner get cold. "He practises not until he gets it right, but until he no longer gets it wrong," said Harris.

She said the fact that he was winning audience prizes — on audience votes — was "perhaps even a greater compliment. No matter how good you are, if you don't have an audience you are washed up."

Watch [Mokgatle dance "Freedom" in 2014](#).