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Twelve-year-old Durban schoolgirl Tarlia Samuels won four gold trophies and a silver medal at Talent America in New York. PICTURE: NIAMH WALSH-VORSTER

Durban's Tarlia leaps for gold at Talent America

Kerushun Pillay

A DURBAN girl left judges awed and amused at the Talent America competition in New York, bringing home five trophies.

Tarlia Samuels, 12, of Maris Stella, bagged gold for four solo dances and silver for a comedic monologue.

Tarlia, who performed as a member of the South African Performing Arts team, told The Mercury yesterday that she was up against tough international competition.

"It was pretty hard," she said. "The girls were older than me, some were teens, so I was super stressed out, but I trained a lot."

Tarlia performed four solo dances in the jazz, ballet, contemporary, and acrobatics categories, all choreographed with her teachers.

"They were all pretty slow dances, except for jazz."

She performed a comedy monologue chosen for her by her drama teacher, who coached her delivery.

Tarlia qualified for the America competition after excelling at Talent Africa in Roodepoort, where she bagged five gold medals and was placed fifth overall out of 170 contestants.

Although it was her first international competition, she is no stranger to competitive dancing. She previously won three silver medals at the South African Championships of Performing Arts, and won the KwaZulu-Natal Cecchetti ballet bursary in her age group three years in a row.

Tarlia said she began ballet lessons at the age of 3.

"When I was small, my mom used to put on music and I used to dance. So she decided to put me in ballet and try it out. After ballet, I felt like I had to do more, and that's how I started contemporary (dancing) and hip hop."

But performing comedy was far more complicated, she said.

"I'm actually quite a shy person and I did drama to get me to not be shy."

As for the future, Tarlia has only one thing in mind.

"After school I want to try out at all the big companies like Juilliard (performing arts school in New York), take lots of workshops and travel.

"I want to be a professional dancer, maybe a teacher."