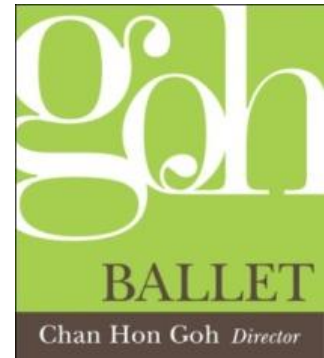


## So You Think You Can Dance: Alex Wong followed his heart

By Debra Yeo, The Star, June 15, 2010

It's not like British Columbian Alex Wong didn't have a lot going for him already when it comes to dance.

He was the first Canadian to win an apprenticeship in the prestigious Prix de Lausanne dance competition in Switzerland in 2004. After spending a year with the American Ballet Theatre in New York City, he joined the Miami City Ballet, becoming a principal soloist with the company. He was one of *Dance Magazine's* "25 to watch in 2010." That's no slouch for just 23.



Photograph by: Mathieu Yong for Fox

But Alex walked away from his ballet career to take part in *So You Think You Can Dance*.

"I just have to follow my heart," he said in a phone interview. "It felt like something I wanted to do, like something I needed to do."

He and the other 10 *SYTYCD* finalists will compete for viewer votes for the first time Wednesday night. (You can watch at 8 p.m. on CTV.)

This isn't Alex's first go-round with the show. He auditioned in Season 5 but had to give up a spot in the top 20 when the ballet company refused to release him from his contract.

Alex explained that he went on that first audition on a whim.

"Just because I had been watching it for so many seasons," when the show held Miami tryouts last year, he figured, "why not give it a shot."

When he made it to Vegas, "I was off, I didn't have anything to do. And I went and I was taken by surprise.

"I didn't realize what I was going to feel when I went there. I saw all these different dancers, these amazing dancers, do all these different forms of dance.

"It was very satisfying to be able to express myself in so many different forms of dance. It caught me off guard. I didn't think it was going to be like that. When I found out I had made the top 20 and couldn't continue, it really crushed me. In the end, it made me want it even more."

You could say Alex's dance career began in his family home.

"I was dancing around my house all the time. I would kind of bring my family into the room, turn off all the lights, hand my dad a flashlight and say, 'Spotlight me,' " said Alex, who was born in Edmonton and lived in Mission and Surrey, B.C., as well as Vancouver.

His formal training started at 7, with tap and jazz. Ballet lessons followed when he was 9 and a half, at the Goh Ballet Academy in Vancouver (founded by the parents of former National Ballet principal dancer Chan Hon Goh, who now runs the school).

He found ballet boring at first but grew to appreciate its "finesse and precision."

Alex, who at 5-foot-8 considers himself short for a male ballet dancer, still has plenty of admiration for the dance form.

"Ideally it would be great to be in a ballet company and be able to do this at the same time. But there's just nowhere it happens," he said.

"I felt *So You Think You Can Dance* has done so much to publicize dance. I really wanted to be a part of it.

"I really wanted to make my own mark in the dance world today."

He's loving the whole *SYTYCD* experience: learning new genres of dance; working with choreographers like Wade Robson and Mia Michaels; working with the other contestants and the past seasons' all-stars; sharing an L.A. apartment with Jose Ruiz, Kent Boyd and Robert Roldan; and being on television.

"To be on that stage with the audience screaming, to hear the beginning of the music for *So You Think You Can Dance*. You hear it on TV, the fact you're actually on it, it's insane. I'm here. I'm doing it. I'm enjoying every minute of it," Alex said.

"The competition isn't for everyone," he added. "It's very stressful. There are days I wake up and I can't walk, I'm so sore.

"But the experience is unforgettable, it's amazing, you will learn so much.

"The way I looked at it was, I said to myself, 'If I don't re-audition this year, am I going to regret it?' " The answer was yes.

No matter how far he makes it in the competition, Alex aims to leave a better dancer and a better person.

"I feel like this show, it opens us up to possibilities ... I'd just like to see what happens from here. I'm open to anything."