

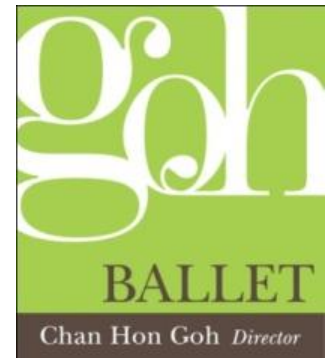
So you think you can win, Alex?

Top 11 finalist: Vancouver dancer Wong gives up gig with Miami ballet for show

By Hans Ongsansoy, The Province, June 16, 2010

We're not going to lie: We sincerely hope Vancouverite-now-Miamian Alex Wong turns out to be Alexander the Great on this latest edition of So You Think You Can Dance.

As the lone Canadian to crack the show's Top 11 finalists, it seems like, duh, of course we'd have to cheer for the ballet dancer whose parents and older brother still live in Surrey.



Photograph by: Handout, Fox

But there's more to Wong's story than that.

A prized pupil with the local Goh Ballet, Wong competed in the Prix de Lausanne after graduating from Magee Secondary in Kerrisdale.

Held in Switzerland, the Prix is such a prestigious international ballet competition that the winner can basically choose whichever company in the world he or she would like to apprentice with.

Wong was the first Canuck to ever win it. He then went on to work with the American Ballet Theatre in New York City, where he stayed for just over a year. For the past five years, he's been a principal soloist with the Miami City Ballet.

Now here's where it gets even more interesting. With all Wong had accomplished by the age of 21, he nevertheless auditioned for SYTYCD's Season 5 and actually made the Top 20. But his contract with the Miami company forced him to withdraw.

This year, at the age of 23, he literally gave up his day job to go for it all on SYTYCD's Season 7. If that's the Wong decision, let's hope it's right!

In between rehearsals this week, Wong took the time to answer some questions about risk-taking, SYTYCD's brand-new format and how dancers wish each other good luck.

What's it mean to be among the Top 11 competitors on the show?

"It's crazy. It's so surreal just to even be here. I had to give up my position at Miami City Ballet this year in order to be eligible for the competition and I pursued it once again and thank God I made it."

So you had to make a choice, a tough choice, of what you wanted to pursue.

"Yeah, it was a very difficult choice."

And you chose the riskier route . . .

"Well, it's 'Never work a day in my life.' That's what it is. I've enjoyed my work since I graduated high school. I went straight into a professional company and it's never felt like I worked a day. With a ballet company, you have a contract, you know when your money is coming in. With this it's a little more risky, you know? You're just kind of bouncing off walls here. The great thing is I love what I do. No dancer is really in it for the money."

So the show itself, why do it?

"It's a lot of everything. I want to do it for personal growth. There's no other place where you can learn and do all these different dance styles and even have it mean something. It's just amazing to be able to express myself in so many different forms of dance and at the same time be able to work with amazing choreographers. And afterward, hopefully there will be great opportunities that arise from it -- you never know what's going to happen. With my gut, I just felt it was something I needed to accomplish right now. And with being so close to being on the show before, it made me want it even more. It was something like, hey if I don't do this, am I going to regret it, and I thought, for sure, I'm going to regret it."

I'm glad you mentioned the chance to learn different styles. Of course, that's one of the biggest components of the show.

"There's really nowhere else you can do that. I mean, you can take a class if you want to. But with this, it's a chance to just push yourself to the limit, to see what you can do, you know what I mean? It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

OK, let's start a cross-border rivalry. Tell me the calibre of dancers on the American version of the show is better than that of the Canadian version.

"To be honest, I don't know because we don't really get a chance to watch the Canadian one too much because it doesn't broadcast in the States. I've seen some of the dancers just because I've worked with them at conventions when I'm teaching. But I really haven't seen too much of [the Canadian show]. But from what I've seen, [the dancers] are great. Here, I can say the calibre for this season is very high. There's 11 of us and I think all 11 are great."

Why are they running an odd number of contestants this year? How is that going to work with coupling up?

"They've actually changed the whole format this year. We were supposed to have a Top 10 and just because of the amount of talent, they decided to add one extra guy. We're not partnering with the other contestants -- they've formed an all-star pool of 12 dancers from previous seasons. And, basically, each week contestants will draw the names of one of the all-stars and then you are paired with the all-star and you dance a piece. The all-star can technically never be out of their own style so whoever you're dancing with is somewhat experienced in that style."

That's, like, totally, completely different.

"It's actually really exciting to work with these all-stars. I think it raises the quality of the dance on the show because, you know, you won't have two dancers who have no idea what they're doing, jumping into a genre they've never seen before. Now maybe it's one deer in the headlights, with one professional."

Now that you've touched on that, how confident are you to be that deer in the headlights?

"Well, my specialty is ballet so pretty much every single thing I do outside of ballet is not in my genre. They don't have ballet on the show so, really, I'm out of my genre every week. Which is fine because I've come here to learn and express myself in different styles of dance. I'm the most nervous about

hip hop and ballroom just because they're on the other end of the spectrum. Contemporary [dance] is the closest to [ballet]."

Do dancers still say "Break a leg" to each other, because I've always felt that was kind of gruesome.

"Not really. Break a leg, I think people usually say that to us. We usually say, 'Hey, good luck' and give a hug. In the ballet world, we say 'Merde.' I don't know why."

Who's the person most rooting for you?

"I guess my family but I have a lot of friends who are rooting for me so much, too."

Good luck!

"Thank you."

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