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New Steps for *So You Think You Can Dance*

July 2, 2009

By

Eric Wolfram

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Phillip Chbeeb and Jeanine Mason slam a hip hop routine choreographed by Tabitha and Napoleon D'umo.

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The final fourteen dancers performed and for the first time ever, classical ballet was featured along with the usual popping, ballroom, jazz and contemporary styles. Plus, Nigel Lythgoe announced a new dance education charity called the [Dizzy Feet Foundation](#). All in all, it made for a fantastic night.

Janette and Brandon danced first - a Cha Cha to a driving disco beat. Always in the right place at the right time, they looked like a couple of ballroom pros with articulated legs and feet, full energy in the arms and the prerequisite over-the-top stage presence. She wore a purple fringy glitter dress and offered plenty of heat. The couple had incredible dynamic range - fast than freezing still. Strobe lights accentuated the mood. Brandon was completely on top of the beat, steps and partnering. He even had the presence to wink at the audience. The couple delivered a particularly sharp finish with a complicated lift that ended with her on the floor. Judge Nigel Lythgoe said that it was the best Cha Cha ever on the show and went on and on about how good they were. Mia Michaels excused herself for putting the hate on Brandon last month when she brutally and inappropriately uttered "I can't take you... what you bring as an artist... it annoys the sh*# out of me." Now she claims that she's hardest on those who are most talented. In fact, it's an abusive sort of jealousy that a teacher sometimes develops for a student.

Kayla and Kuponon performed contemporary, vampire-inspired choreography. Kayla, who demonstrated a mesmerizing wild abandon last week in the waltz, showed a completely different, but equally compelling movement quality this week. This week started with Kuponon dragging Kayla around by her leg. Kayla certainly looked undead as she danced in dark eyeliner and pale white skin. Her weighty, sharp and current movements were accented with strong technical displays - like a rock solid triple pirouette and superb lines with her legs. Kuponon, the weaker dancer in the couple, rose to her level and didn't detract from the moment at all. His grand leaps were diminished slightly as he looked towards the ground. To be fair, this might have been part of the choreography, but it's also a common rookie mistake. Judge Mary Murphy put them on the hot tamale train. Here is a couple that was given an interesting and hip piece of choreography. They took it as a gift and delivered.

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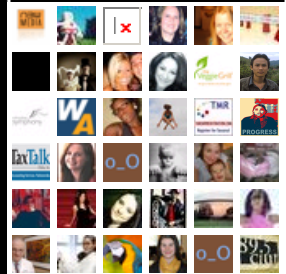


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Randi Evans and Evan Kasprzak punch at the air in a Broadway routine choreographed by Joey Dowling.

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By contrast, Randi and Evan were given a dated and stylized Broadway-inspired piece with no tricks, no lifts and nothing spectacular. The choreography was retro, but the wrong type of retro. It didn't evoke a comfortable sense of nostalgia about the past and instead evoked a moment in time that seems extremely cornball today. This Fossy-style jazz done to music from the musical *Sweet Charity*, featured a tedium of fists and precise punching moves, which served to abbreviate the lines on these already compact dancers. The judges carefully chastised them, probably sensing that the choreography didn't help. Mia Michaels, with her typical, self-absorbed tact, rode on them for being short.

Caitlin and Jason performed an other-worldly jazz number to grating club music by choreographer Brian Friedman. It was an alien procreation fantasy full of unusual steps and hissing, open-mouthed facial expressions. A human in alien clothing, Caitlin left the choreography at the launching pad. She and Jason both faced the same problems that plagued them last week - the choreography was bigger than they could deliver. And although Jason gave us some spectacular big jumps and Caitlin had moments of highly impressive athletic sharpness, they were not taking up the space. This was an opportunity to devour the rolls, to be absolutely wild and intense, but they left it on the stage half-digested as if it were a regional talent show.

Phillip and Jeanine were chained together, literally, as they danced a hip hop routine by Napoleon and Tabitha D'umo. Phillip popped and hit the choreography like a seasoned street dancer and Jeanine stayed right with him. They dealt with the prop with such forethought and professionalism, that we were able to quickly forget about the complications of dancing while being chained at the feet. The symbolism did it's magic. They brought the magic, too. Mia Michaels said she couldn't get beyond the chain, but she liked the parts of the dancing that she did see.

Then Melissa and Ade performed a classical pas de deux, *Romeo and Juliet* to the Prokofiev score. This was the first time that *So You Think You Can Dance* has featured a classical ballet with pointe shoes. Although this style allowed Melissa to demonstrate her ballet technique and to show off her lovely arabesque line and port de bras, it exposed her thin, smiley interpretation of Juliet to the deep and complex interpretations offered by great ballerinas of the past. It's interesting to notice how her ballet technique helps her when doing other styles, but how it exposes her to such comparisons when she attempts the classics. Ade executed a respectable double saut de basque - a leaping, double turn that is not easy to pull off. His classical technique and line is not as strong as her, though. He ran like a pedestrian. Still, he is a raw, strong and attentive dance partner. He scooped her up and ran with such confidence and ease. They are a couple to contend with.

Finally, Karla and Vitolio danced the quick step. This style has been the kiss of death in the past because it's has been easy for certain contemporary or street dancers to look completely foolish while attempting these moves. But Karla and Vitolio performed it with ease and in an entertaining way. They glided across the floor, holding shape with their upper body as their feet weaved and pranced quickly below. It was like Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire with the occasional flair of huge lifts and jumps. Judge Mia Michaels said Karla looked scared, and maybe she was, but I don't think she has anything to be afraid of this week.

The two couples that should be afraid are Randi and Evan and Caitlin and Jason. The third couple in the bottom is anybody's guess.

[Eric Wolfram](#) appeared on renowned stages like the Paris Opera in Paris, The Kirov in St. Petersburg, Lincoln Center in New York and The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. while performing with the critically-acclaimed Royal Winnipeg Ballet and San Francisco Ballet. Today he films dance in New York City.



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