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So You Think You Can Dance Recap: Wade Robson's Superb Choreography

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By
Eric Wolfram
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Brandon Bryant and Janette Manrara in Wade Robson choreography.

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Ade has great stage presence. Every movement he makes is masculine. He's a dude and any woman would look petite next to him, but especially Melissa with her ethereal quality, curly hair, and lovely, flexible body. Yet, even with this masculine quality, he is able to get into a dance groove. He's not afraid of moving his hips and gyrating.

And that's how [So You Think You Can Dance](#) started last night, with Melissa and Ade dancing a funky disco by Dorianna Sanchez. He jumped over a banister and proceeded to twirl her with at least four grand lifts. The audience never worried that such a man would drop his partner. There were big smiles from both of them and Melissa's joy is infectious. Even though she fell at the end of the dance from dizziness, their strong partnership carried the evening's opening piece and set the bar high for the following performances.

First, lets face the obvious: In this competition it matters which style of dance the performers are given. Last night we saw Phillip and Jeanine suffer through a Russian folk dance. We saw Brandon and Janette benefit from an ultra-cool creation by Wade Robson. Karla and Vitolio were voted off last week after a strong performance of the quickstep, a "kiss of death" selection, which nobody seems to vote for. Of course, luck favors the prepared and a couple can still fail at a popular style or, hopefully, succeed when they draw one of the less popular styles.

Last night, Kuono and Kayla benefited from the compelling choreography of Mia Michaels, which was a depiction of a woman's struggle with addiction. Kuono played the dark, addictive power over the vulnerable and suffering Kayla. The couple got into the roles. This is an example of two strong performers

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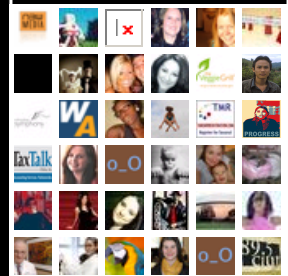


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with some meaty choreography excelling above the others.



Kupono Aweau and Kayla Radomski in a contemporary routine about addiction by Mia Michaels.

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Next, Caitlin and Jason, who drew the kiss-of-death quickstep this week. They performed to the song *Mini the Moocher*. Although it seems that they held back again, two judges, Nigel and Mary Murphy, praised them for their reserve and implied that it had a calm, coolness that they enjoyed, but guest judge Tyce Diorio said he wanted more from them.

It was then that Phillip and Jeanine attempted a quaint Russian character dance. This pure folksy museum piece wouldn't stand up to the evening's other performances, which all had a contemporary and current vibe. This sort of folk dancing is highly stylized and requires training in the specific carriage of the arms and in a particular way of moving the head and shoulders. It's not Phillip's style of dancing at all and it seems he had no frame of reference for the style. Jeanine seemed to get it a bit better, yet they were both dragged down by the plinky ka-linka music and level II character steps. This performance was certainly the evening's low point.

Things didn't get lifted much after that by Randi and Evan's hip hop. It was a good effort but neither of them could get into the pocket of the beat. Their moves seemed to keep moving when they should have stopped or popped. The couple wasn't helped by being, perhaps, the most wholesome couple to ever attempt to hip hop. Although Nigel said that they were one of his favorite couples, guest judge Tyce thought Evan needed to give more.

That's when Janette and Brandon became the hot southern wind that blew the night out of the doldrums. Performing an authentic Argentine tango, this strong couple gave a completely professional performance. She has a mature quality as a performer. She becomes the character as opposed to adding a sprinkle of personality as an extra layer on top of the steps. She's intense. Her interpretations are deep and believable and Brandon was right there with her. Nigel said that this routine this was "as close to perfection" as any ballroom performance on *So You Think You Can Dance* — ever. All three judges gave it a standing ovation.

Melissa and Ade took the stage again and performed a waltz to *You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman*. Although Ade pulled off some impressive turns, this was Melissa's moment to shine. Her great lines and stature coupled with her softness and conviction made the piece. Judge Mary Murphy focused on Melissa, too, and said that Ade's waltz steps could have been better.

Kayla and Kupono danced a jazz piece to *West Side Story* music. Although it was performed with precision, something was missing from the performance. Nigel couldn't get over *West Side Story* and wanted to see that '50s angst in the steps. Maybe that was the issue. Kayla is one of the more special dancers on the show and it's a shame that she didn't demonstrate that better throughout the evening.

Caitlin and Jason's second performance was a lyrical jazz number by Mandy Moore. Jason's bare, statuesque upper body moved to pleasing drum and vocal music. His impressive lifts and Caitlin's pretty lines made the piece work - it was easy to see that they both loved performing this choreography. Caitlin ate up the space, for a change, with large steps and huge, flowing arms. Judge Mary Murphy said she



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didn't see the magic. However, this performance may have saved them from the curse of the quickstep, the style of their preceding performance.

Phillip and Jeanine danced the jive, which is historically another kiss-of-death selection. This jive, however, had a very swingy, lindy hop feel that was appealing. You'd think that a couple who pulled Russian folk dancing and the jive wouldn't stand a chance when the voting started, especially a street dancer like Phillip who lacks formal dance training, but Phillip pulled this jive out of a hat and judge Nigel agreed.

Next to perform was Randi and Evan, who did a cool samba. She was in a chocolate, leopard print outfit. This piece was supposed to sizzle, but it was a slow bake. Evan was a bit stiff and way too subtle for this sort of cheesy, ballroom-style samba. I don't know if that's a bad thing for him overall, necessarily, but the piece needed something that the couple didn't bring.

That's when Janette and Brandon showed how fortunate they were to dance a thoroughly original, fun and cartoonish piece by choreographer Wade Robson. Robson's choreography is always 2009, very "now." He certainly has his finger on the pulse. Furthermore, his choreography is superb in its conception. It doesn't take itself too seriously, but *is* seriously intriguing to watch. His choreography creates its own world. It's not about addiction or your father dying or unrequited love or all the other crutches that dance can communicate so well, but which can also seem cheesy on the predictable frameworks that choreographers sometimes hang their steps on. Robson's choreography stands on its own and is one of the major reasons why serious dance aficionados should be watching *So You Think You Can Dance*.

But enough about Robson, Janette seems to have deep artistic references to draw upon and brings them to every role she performs. She has an ability to draw on life and bring it to the dance floor as a true artist. This is why a salsa dancer can look so incredibly at home dancing the hip and stylized moves of Robson while wearing a bowler hat and funky, white glasses. Brandon also picked up the Robson style. He can do "Wade." He completely captured his movement quality and performed it with full energy. That's not something every dancer can do. Both performers were sharp with no mushiness and rose up to the level of the piece. Nigel and Mary said it was the best performance of the night and it was.

[Eric Wolfram](#) appeared on renowned stages like the Paris Opera in Paris, The Kirov in St. Petersburg, Lincoln Center in New York, 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.

Disclaimer: The views of Eric Wolfram are not necessarily the views of Voice of Dance

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