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There was reason to expect the worst. Who knew we'd end up getting the best?

Let's face it, the track record of Canadian adaptations of American reality show formats has been somewhat spotty. *Canadian Idol*, superficially at least a slavish clone of the U.S. version, has never approached its sizzle and snap. It is – okay, let's say it – dull. *Canada's Next Top Model* was just too painful to watch.

*Project Runway Canada*, on the other hand, very closely approximates its American counterpart ... and, given the latter's ongoing upheaval, may soon even surpass it.

But even in its inaugural season, *So You Think You Can Dance Canada* is already there.

It's down to the fabled "Final Four" tonight at 8 in the final performance show on CTV. And then, in another two-hour blowout starting at 9 p.m., the four will become two and the two will become one, as "Canada's Favourite Dancer" on Canada's favourite show.

It's a show next to which the American original starts to look like a faded Xerox copy.

Five reasons why *So You Think You Can Dance Canada* dances circles around *So You Think You Can Dance*:

1. The dancers Creator/co-producer Nigel Lythgoe has said it, and so have visiting judges Dan Karaty and the vocally volatile Mary Murphy: our dancers are better, perhaps the best in the world (and there are almost as many exported *Dances* as there are countries to dance in).

They are not, as I've said before, just blowing smoke up our tutus. By and large, from the auditions on, the Canadian contestants have been quite astonishingly accomplished, particularly in light of their comparative youth. And they are also far more regionally representative than their American counterparts, which also speaks to their overall excellence.

Even in the all-important personality department – and let's not forget, it is "Canada's favourite dancer," not "Canada's best" – they have exhibited the camaraderie and depth of character that the American dancers don't usually arrive at until they're down to their final 10.

2. The production The differences here are even more obvious and would be even more so were the Canadian producers not hamstrung (ouch) by the franchise's insistence on identical opening and closing credits, and standardized logo and set design.

As hinted at in the fabulous pre-debut CTV promos, we would have done a much better job.

As it is, though, our camerawork just gets better and better, even as theirs has started to rapidly decline. The editing of the montage and rehearsal sequences are similarly superior and superb. We've even managed to outdo our *Dance* predecessors in the uniquely American art of product placement: a revenue-generating gap for which they should be justifiably ashamed.

And the costume design ... well, the often ludicrously over-the-top American outfits are vastly outmatched by the often just as extreme, yet still more inventive and attractive dancewear provided the Canadian contenders.

Which kind of segues into a discussion of homegrown host Leah Miller, faced with the daunting – and let's face it, impossible – task of following in Cat Deeley's towering stilettos. Miller confided to me that she's far more comfortable in heels, but I suspect that may also have something to do with what they've done with the rest of her wardrobe. Miller never looks anything less than classy and well put-together, unlike Deeley, whose often awful hair and outfits never quite seem to match.

(One suggestion, Leah, and it's a small one: please stop punching that second-last syllable, as in "And here are your JUDG-es ..." You do it a lot and it's starting to get annoying. I say this as a friend.)

3. The judges And here are your judges. For one thing, we have four instead of three, expertly anchored by regulars Tré Armstrong, street-dance diva and star of *How She Move*, and ballroom veteran Jean-Marc Généreux, returning home from his prominent spot as choreographer on the American version.

One might say that we are missing out on such U.S. staples as Mary Murphy and the brilliant Mia Michaels, except of course we haven't missed them at all, Murphy in particular.

And if we haven't had the remarkable erudition of choreographer Lil' C, or the weepy enthusiasm of a Debbie Allen, we have had in-house dance master Blake McGrath and his fellow Canuck Sean Cheesman. On top of that, the judges' table has hosted everyone from *High School Musical's* Kenny Ortega to Canadian ballet stud "Sexy Remy" Harrington.

Their expertise and enthusiasm, along with that of host Miller, surpasses even that of the American show – and that's saying something.

4. The choreography We have likewise played host to some of the best of the Americans, including the aforementioned Lil' C (in the rehearsal hall, if not on the panel), Mia Michaels and anchor judge Généreux. But add to that McGrath, Cheesman, Armstrong, fellow rotating judges Luther Brown and Melissa Williams ... and many, many more, on both sides of the camera.

And while I have to give the best of the American choreographers props for inventiveness, outrageousness and originality, I have to say the Canadian pieces are by and large a lot more consistent.

Again, one very minor quibble: I had hoped to see a more varied reflection of the vast cultural diversity of this country, which the melting pot Americans at least pay lip service to. Something to think about for next season.

5. The pride and the passion Dancers, judges, host, fans ... even in the face of our collective Canadian inferiority complex, we do seem to have taken genuine pride in the accomplishments of the show, its producers and participants. You can see it in the sincere emotion onscreen and the fierce loyalty of its dedicated viewers, an enthusiastic audience that relatively speaking exceeds even that of the original show, now four seasons in.

Then again, it may just be residual resentment that they wouldn't even let us vote.

The notion has already been floated of a major North American dance-off. I say, bring it on.

In the meantime, we still have the final four face-off tonight, with the winner announced Sunday.

To your right is a look at the remaining contenders and one fan's (okay, mine) handicapping of their chances.