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Want pure entertainment? Watch 'So You Think You Can Dance Canada'

By John Doyle

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There are some breathtaking moves on display on season four of the show

Sometimes, of an evening, after I've watched *Fox Soccer Report*, I dance. I do the Wobble, and the Watusi too.

Well, not every night. And no one's watching anyway. Except the cats. You should try it. There's not enough dancing going on, I'm telling you. It's good for you and you feel dead sexy when you're doing it. In fact, the sexiest thing on Canadian TV in the past while has been the one-minute promos for season four of *So You Think You Can Dance Canada*. Four tattooed young people move with emphatic grace and power inside what looks like a long silver tube. That description doesn't do it justice. The minute of movement just beggars description.

As constant readers will know, I'm a tad fed up with the singing shows. All those contrived karaoke competitions featuring enthusiastic amateurs turning every single ditty - already over-familiar pop songs - into power ballads. At this point, I'd rather watch amateur jugglers or people who play the spoons in a jug band.

But the dance - now, that's different. The bliss of movement and the artistry of using the body to express the essence of emotion. Also, a lot less adolescent ego.

So You Think You Can Dance Canada returned this week (CTV, Mondays 8 p.m., repeated Fridays, MuchMusic 7 p.m.) with a bang. I don't mean the ratings - a very impressive 1.1 million viewers. I mean the level and variety of talent on display in the first audition show from Toronto.

The show is already established as something of a phenomenon in Canada. The level of interest is intense during its run and there's nothing contrived about the atmosphere during live tapings of the show. Believe me, I've been to several.

Still, what was startling about the first episode was the astonishing variety of moves, manoeuvres, turns and locomotions going on. Some were simply breathtaking.

The show is an international franchise, of course, with a set format: judges, dancers, voting. Personal stories are woven into the performances. Keeping the show feisty and compelling requires a deep pool of talent and a commitment from young people who see success on the show as something worth achieving. That means hard work

and endless practice. On *SYTYCDC*, the contestants keep coming back. The first show featured several people who had either failed to make it past the audition last time and several people who had reached the later stages before but want to go even farther.

No one who saw the show could forget Jordan Clark, an 18-year-old from Tottenham, Ont. - an impressive presence for her mass of curly red hair. Her dance performance was powerfully athletic and simultaneously delicate. She arrived mere minutes into the show and got a standing ovation from the judges. Top-four material obviously.

There were several others as well, including A.J. Lopresti, a 23-year-old from Ancaster, Ont. He had auditioned before as a contemporary dancer and returned this time doing tap. Cassandra Flammini, 18, did a remarkably assured and original routine to Peggy Lee's *Fever*. Daniel Keith Morrison, who is 23, made an entertaining speech about how dance brought respect, like martial arts. This made him sound a bit odd, but when he began dancing, there was nothing odd about it: The guy was sensational.

Host Leah Miller handled it all with her usual aplomb. At the audition stage, she mostly does voice-overs and occasionally stands in front of the camera to link sequences together. Later, her onstage appearances in heels and tight dresses make her a more integral part of the production. (There are probably some chaps who watch just for that.)

From the start, though, the judges are a big part of the show. Tre Armstrong, Rex Harrington, Mary Murphy, Luther Brown and Jean-Marc Genereux know their stuff, delivering the praise and caution with the usual array of catchphrases. Blake McGrath, the occasional judge, who himself participated as a contestant on *So You Think You Can Dance*, can be downright intimidating in his insistence on excellence. As for Murphy, who also appears as a judge on the U.S. version, her cackles and squeals add a baroque quality to the show.

It's all good. After seeing just one episode, I look forward to seeing some of these dancers perform in front of the adoring and appreciative audience in the studio. Those kids who shout encouragement when they see difficult moves performed. The way a male dancer tossing his female partner in one of those over-the-head moves makes the crowd gasp. The way a female dancer in full stride, all rippling strength and confidence, makes the young women in the audience roar.

So You Think You Can Dance Canada is an excellent bet for pure TV entertainment right now. Better than those bland singing shows. Watch and then dance. Do you a power of good. Wobble or Watusi. Your choice. Just dance.

Check local listings.