

SO YOU THINK DANCE CAN



T BY LYNSEY KITCHING • PHOTOS BY LANA PESANT

here's something oh so human about dancing – when the movements created to accompany the rhythm become one with it, turning the dancer into a vessel of expression for the song, themselves, the audience, and the moment. When this connection is made, the magic is felt throughout the room, and in some cases, in millions of homes across the country.

So You Think You Can Dance originated in 2005 as an American reality television show created by Simon Fuller and Nigel Lythgoe, and swept the nation, unveiling an enormous underground dance scene and drawing attention to a craft previously overlooked by mainstream media. Running on the success to the south, *So You Think You Can Dance Canada* (SYTYCDC) has become a staple program in many Canadian homes. Tuesday nights on CTV, talented and hardworking performers give their all to become Canada's favourite dancer. The show became the most-watched new program during its first season in 2008.

The showcased dancers from across the country compete to woo the expert panel of judges, and the viewing audience. In each auditioning city, a select group of competitors are invited to Finals Week, in Toronto, where they work with some of Canada's top choreographers.

Last season (season two), the winner was Tara-Jean Popowich, who went home with \$100,000 and a new car. Recently, she and the other finalists toured across Canada, performing their most-loved routines for audiences at 18 venues across the country. Finalist Emanuel Sandhu says: "I love knowing that I'm making people happy by doing something I love and being a part of history. Dance has never been as watched as it is now; it's truly a part of pop culture. I'm so proud to be a dancer, especially a ballet dancer."

Finalist Everett Smith also points to how dancing helps people learn to push themselves, "One of the biggest highlights for me is being able to touch people's lives, and seeing how we've been able to inspire people to dance and continue with their dreams of being dancers, uplifting the spirits of others. Receiving feedback

from fans and my supporters is so, so rewarding. It really affirms to me that there's no challenge you can't conquer if you put your mind to it." He continues, "We had a little girl from the Make-A-Wish Foundation come to the final live show during the season and her wish was to see my tap dance and she came to see us on tour in Edmonton. She was dancing up a storm for all of us and she entertained us! It was really touching and it's a moment I'll keep forever."

CANADIAN CREW REPRESENTS

A very important component to any successful dance number is the song. The mood of the tune sets the tone for the dance, and without a solid sound crew backing its tour, SYTYCDC would not have been the success it was.

The crew for the Canadian tour was well versed in its routine, this being the second Canadian tour and with many members having traveled with the American SYTYCD tour – illustrating the talent found in our vast land. The crew consisted of Jamie Howieson as FOH engineer, Luke Purchase as line array technician, and Jamie Carlson as stage manager and sole female production crewmember on the traveling tour. Jamieson says: "This is an all-Canadian show. Jamie's from Canada, Luke's from Canada, I'm from Canada. This is an American company, 19 Entertainment, which has hired a Canadian company to come and do sound for them."

This is not a common occurrence and is indicative of the skills found among this strong Canadian crew. Jamieson says, "We did such a good job for them when 19 Entertainment came to do the first Canadian tour that they asked us back to do a second."

Carlson points to how well this crew gels – an important factor considering the amount of time they must spend together whether working or traveling. She says: "Everyday is different because we're working with a different crew of local people, but all of our guys are so good at working with each other and this gear that there's not really much we can run into other than a

THANK YOU CAN DANCE CANADA



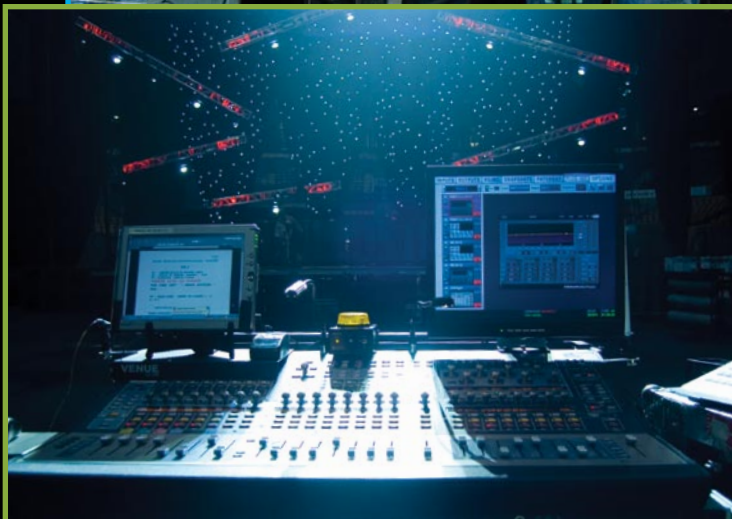
snow storm that's going to de-rail us for a day.' She continues saying, "We did the US tour, which ran from the end of September to the end of November, and came across into Toronto for one date and then went back and did the rest of the US tour. On November 23, we all drove to Kelowna, BC and started the Canadian tour with the Canadian dancers."

The second cool feature of this tour is having Carlson as the stage manager, a strong female in a male-dominated field making sure everything flows. She says: "My gig is to make sure everything works together. If the lighting truss ends up in a different spot someday because of a rigging point, or something ends up weird, it's my job to make sure everything works as a whole."

The crew puts in long hours, having to make quick decisions – counting on and learning from one another. Carlson says: "Oddly enough, I really like the schedule and working with these people especially. Everyone here is really great and has made my job a lot easier. I've learned a lot from everyone who's out here. I think that's the big thing. The best part about this job is that every day, I'm forced to learn something new. My job is constantly changing even though we're doing the same thing everyday. We're always trying to adapt to a different building or to a different crew or situation. To be able to adapt is probably the best part of my job."

One of those important people making Carlson's life easier is

SPREAD: Top 10 from season two take the stage in Toronto.
ABOVE: (L-R) Luke Purchase, Jamie Carlson, Jamie Howieson.
LEFT: The FOH console setup at The Air Canada Centre.



SO YOU THINK YOU CAN DANCE CANADA

Howieson, with his 25 years of experience in the industry. Carlson says, "Everything is always super consistent. Jamie especially is huge on consistency. That's his thing. His rigging points need to be exact and he does it for a reason, and that's one of the reasons his shows sound really good. He has a smaller rig out here but it sounds way bigger."

BRINGING THE SOUND

On the *SYTYCDC* tour Howieson is responsible for having chosen all the sound equipment and for making it crisp and clear for the dancers and the audience. The music being used for the routines is all recorded music, which creates a unique climate for him to work in. He says, "It's actually more difficult than I thought it was going to be. To get pre-recorded music to sound good live is actually quite tricky because you have to make it loud and dynamic so it doesn't sound like you're at a night club."

He continues, explaining how he manages the recorded songs, "There is different processing, I use multi-band



FOH GEAR LIST

- 1 Digidesign VENUE SC 48
 - 2 IBM Laptops
 - 2 Motion Lab Tablets
- 1 D-Link Ethernet Switch
- 1 D-Link Access Point
- 2 7.5 DBI Antennas
 - 1 360 2

Programs

- 1 Radmin 3
- 1 SMAART Live 5
- 1 Analyzer Bridge
- 1 Dolby Lake Controller
- 1 XConsole

FAR LEFT: VTC Pro Audio ELS118 Elevation Series subwoofers.

LEFT: The team constructs the line array configuration.

ABOVE: VTC Pro Audio EL210 Elevation Series line array cabinets.

compression to control it. A large aspect about the recorded music is it's coming from choreographers who have mixed it all, so the playback sounds different from one song to the next. It's not like playing a CD that's been mastered. I have to control it the best I can to make it sound as smooth and dynamic as possible, giving the audience a bit of the live performance feel."

Along with Howieson's engineering experience is the system used to amplify the sound. These devices must be positioned in a strategic fashion to ensure desirable sound for the performers and the audience. Howieson says: "I'm the sound designer and the system builder for the show. Our VTC system met the show's criteria for a few reasons. It was the right selection for the audience and it met the budget. Shows of this nature have sharper budgets than others, so to try and give it the best quality I could for its budget, I selected the VTC system."

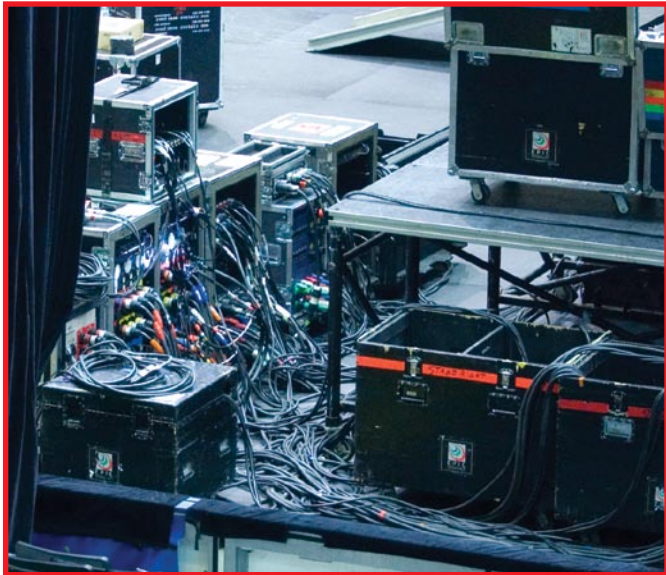
He continues, explaining the reason

for the specific positioning of the equipment, "When designing the stage monitoring for the dancers, there were two things to consider. One thing is that all the performers are in front of the PA system therefore they hear it. Also, I have a set of monitors that are set up to fill in the upstage area."

Having two separate sources of sound could be confusing for the dancers if not exactly in time. Howieson explains how he controls the output: "It's tricky because I must have the monitors time aligned with the main PA, so the dancers don't hear a differential in time between the stage monitor and the main PA. They're EQ'd to match the low-mid, high-mid, and HF of the main PA."

MORE GEAR...

- 16 x Lab.gruppen fP 6400 power amplifiers
- 3 x Shure UR4D dual wireless receivers
- 5 x Shure UR2 handheld mics (one spare)
- 1 x Dolby Lake processor
- 4 x VTC Pro Audio DLMS 4080 crossovers
- 32 x VTC Pro Audio EL210 Elevation Series line array cabinets
- 16 x VTC Pro Audio ELS118 Elevation Series subwoofers
- 8 x VTC Pro Audio FF1 Inception Series Front Fill cabinets



LEFT: Patch Area.

ABOVE: Workers securing rigging points in the rafters.

Purchase explains a few reasons for the placement of the equipment and the differences he finds in working with recorded sound rather than live music, "Having the PA upstage of the main dance area and the performers talking into microphones downstage of the main PA caused us problems with gain before feedback; however, using the correct amount of parametric equalization remedied this problem. With pre-recorded material there is obviously less gear to be set up in a day. Once we get the PA up Jamie can start tuning the PA to the room. With live music we would have to get the gear set up, check all the mics, and then get the band out to do a sound check. With recorded music we can spend lots of time making things sound as good as possible in a shorter amount of time."

NAILING THE ROUTINE

The crew members had two weeks of rehearsal in Burbank, CA, where they flew the system and tested it, finding it worked really well for this type of show. The system employed on the tour remains the same from show to show; however, Howieson and Purchase are constantly making little adjustments to ensure the best possible performance. To do this, he uses his ears as well as measurement systems. He says, "I tweak it every day. I'm a total tweak head. The car can never go fast enough," he says with a smirk. "We're always changing it, always trying to make it better. I'm working directly with VTC and they're great to work with. We're really trying to get the best we can out of this product. Today I changed the zoning of the PA. For the main array system, I have different zones in the vertical so I can control high-frequency shading – that changes daily. Today is a shorter throw than normal therefore, the HF shading has to be changed to match the venue. With the multiple zoning and the array calculator I can get the HF and the SPL very even from the first row to the last row."

Howieson is explaining the set-up at the Air Canada Centre for the Toronto stop of the tour, and the venue holds a major obstacle for the design and the positioning of the rig. He says, "This set-up was difficult because the diameter of the overhead clock is so large. It doesn't allow for easy placement of the rigging points because it has a large diameter and is directly above our stage. We did get a few points behind it but there are some very large bridals that are suspended right underneath the clock; that's a difficult thing to do." This is a problem not uncommon in sporting arena venues, Howieson says. "It's not like we haven't run into that before; it just requires a little bit more mathematics in the morning."

Onboard to assist Howieson in the construction and placement of the rig is Purchase. Howieson says, "Luke is my right-hand man. He is the line array tech and RF tech. He gets the rig up and down and does a great job running the crew."

THAT'S A WRAP

The Canadian *SYTYCD* tour ended its trail having started in Kelowna on November 23, traveling across the country in two giant tour buses. The crew and performers completed 18 successful and entertaining shows, finishing off in Halifax on December 22, 2009. Carlson says, "I usually started about 9:45 a.m. In Canada, the schedule was really tight and we didn't have a lot of days off. We were a two-truck show, so we were able to load in relatively late on load-in standards. It's a pretty relaxed show to be loading in at 10 a.m."

The reason Carlson was able to have a few extra winks is because of the organization and co-operative nature of the crew. Although all members point to great equipment making this show possible, just as pertinent is a crew that gels and enjoys working together. Purchase says, "This has been my favourite tour I've ever been on. It's a good crew, fun days, and they take care of us really well."

In a similarly genuine tone, Carlson explains why she loved her job with *SYTYCDC*, "Everything went really well. It was a big undertaking for me personally. It went really smoothly and all the guys on our crew are really great to work with. I'm really fortunate."

One of those great guys, and important part to their well-oiled machine, Howieson is reminded why he loves his job through experiences like the *SYTYCDC* tour: "Quite honestly I'm enjoying myself. I like working with the kids. Well I call them kids, they're all 20 years old," he says with a laugh. "It's a great experience for them. It's a big deal for them to be here and to be part of that is very important. I've been in the industry for a long time now, and to have that energy rub off on you is just healthy. Maybe I'll stay in it for another 10 years because of this." ■



Lynsey Kitching is the Assistant Editor of Professional Sound.