

Local teens to compete for Canada at World Dance Challenge

By Zachary Roman

Many long days spent training will soon pay off for three local dancers.

Kassandra Seymour, 13, Hannah Bell, 16, and Kat Tanga, 19, are traveling to Mexico from July 22 to 29 for the International Dance Organization's World Dance Challenge.

Seymour and Bell live in Caledon, while Tanga lives in Brampton. All three train at the House of Fame Dance Academy and are a part of the Canadian National Dance Team this year.

The World Dance Challenge hasn't been able to be held for the past few years due to the pandemic, and the 2023 competition marks its return.

It's being held in Monterrey, Mexico at the Cintermex International Convention and Exhibition Center.

Seymour, Bell, and Tanga have been training in multiple dance disciplines, such as contemporary, lyrical, jazz, hip hop, ballet, and salsa. Over the years, the three dancers have trained in pretty much every dance discipline there is to train in.

Bell explained the World Dance Challenge is a four- to five-day competition, and before it even starts, there are conventions to attend where choreographers from around the world will teach routines.

"There's famous teachers from all over the world," said Bell. "I'm very excited for that part, definitely a once in a lifetime experience, the choreographers will be amazing."

For the competition itself, countries can enter their dancers in as many disciplines as they'd like. There's solo, duet, trio and group performances, and Bell, Seymour, and Tanga are each in five or six different dances.

Other than Seymour's journey to Florida for a dance competition, this will be the first time the three dancers have traveled outside of Canada to compete.

Traveling to an international competition doesn't come cheap, and Seymour explained she and her fellow dancers have created sponsorship packages to seek support from local businesses. In turn, the dancers will promote their sponsors online and thank them.

Bell said right now, Seymour, Tanga and her are training between 10 and 15 hours per week at their studio. Additionally, three to six times a month, they're training with the Canadian National Dance Team for eight to 12 hours.

"I'm really excited to see all the different dancers from different countries, because dance from one place to another is even from one studio to another is completely different," said Bell.

Seymour agreed and said it's going to be nice to see how people from other countries dance and how it differs from dance in Canada. Tanga said training with new choreographers will help her, Seymour, and Bell grow as dancers.

Bell said dance is one big community.

"Every dancer is connected, that's what I love about it," she said. "You go to competitions and you make friends there."

Even though they've been training so much already, the three dancers will continue to learn new dance routines as the competition

approaches. Once they're in Mexico, they'll still keep practicing right up until the competition begins.

Maintaining energy is no easy task during the dancers' grueling training schedule. Bell said it's very important that they get lots of sleep, eat right, actually take their break days, and drink lots of water.

Seymour said for some of the more complex and demanding moves like flips, it's better to not practice them every single time in a routine. By just marking the move, the dancer can save valuable energy during those eight- to 12-hour training sessions.

Tanga said growing up as a competition dancer, she always wanted to see how far she could go, and attending an international competition is the next step for her. Bell said she's always wanted to compete in an international competition since her cousin did it years ago. Seymour said competing for Canada is an amazing chance to showcase her skills.

Bell said the House of Fame Dance Academy is a very supportive studio and that she wants to inspire the younger dancers by attending the World Dance Challenge.

While the competition is in beautiful Mexico, Tanga said the trip will not be a vacation. The dancers will have very busy schedules, almost down to the minute.

Bell is most excited for a group dance choreographed over Zoom by a man from Africa named Hope. Hope created the song Bell and her group will be dancing to himself, and Bell said the way the beat and the dance moves came together is amazing.

Seymour is most excited for a group dance in which every member of the Canadian National Dance Team will participate. She said each member is going to have a chance to shine during the seven-minute dance that goes through a variety of different songs.

Tanga is most excited for the group jazz routine.

"I love the choreography, I love the style of it, jazz has been my favourite style forever," said Tanga.