

Dancing on air

ON STAGE / World premiere dance piece explores themes linked to oxygen

Chris Dupuis / Toronto / Tuesday, October 02, 2012

Ryan Lee was 10 before he realized his mom was a lesbian. The Toronto dancer's parents had split five years earlier, shortly before his mother's female "friend" moved in. But their relationship didn't become clear until he made an off-colour joke about then-host of *America's Funniest Home Videos* Bob Saget.

"I thought calling him Bob faggot would be funny," the London, Ontario, native says. "That's the moment she decided to come out to me. She said I couldn't use that word and explained why. I had no idea I was gay at that point. I just had a lot of friends who were girls and I loved Jason on *General Hospital*."

It took a few more years for Lee to come out, but having a gay in the family certainly aided the process. When it came to choosing a career in dance, though, his family was skeptical.

"They've always been supportive but worry about the financial aspects of it," he says. "I'm always going from contract to contract, so there's no steady paycheck. But I really believe if you find that thing that drives you, you'll find a way to make it happen."

Since graduating from Ryerson's dance program in 2007, Lee has racked up a steady stream of credits with Toronto companies, including The Chimera Project and Toronto Dance Theatre. This year marks his fifth season with ProArteDanza. Founded in 2004 by former National Ballet of Canada dancer and choreographer Roberto Campanella, the company melds ballet and contemporary elements to create explosive, technically complex dance works.

"I love working with them because you're always being asked to push yourself to your physical and emotional limits," he says. "It demands a huge amount of passion on the part of the performers. A lot of the work is based on the relationships between the dancers, so you're communicating something with every step."

Lee appears in two of the evening's four pieces: a remount of 2009's *Beethoven's 9th - 1st Movement* and the world premiere of *Expire*, choreographed by Campanella and Robert Glumbek. Based loosely on the theme of oxygen, the piece explores elements like suffocation and hyperventilation.

"It's a group of really beautiful people sweating as much as they can," he laughs. "There's a lot of really intense colour in our costumes and this huge banner of material we're working with. We'll have to see what it looks like in the theatre under lights, but it could probably pass for a Pride float."

For the moment, Lee and company are still in the gritty stage of rehearsal, a part of the process audiences often forget about.

"Creating work is so much less glamorous than the final product," he says. "When you turn up on opening night, you see all these gorgeous people, made up, hair done and in these incredible costumes. Earlier that week we were all in a studio that smells like cat piss, rolling all over each other, looking like shit. Dance is an art form, but it's also hard fucking work."

*ProArteDanza presents
Season 2012*



Ryan Lee dances in ProArteDanza's *Expire*.

Wed, Oct 3-Sat, Oct 6, 8pm
Thurs, Oct 4, 1pm
Harbourfront Centre
Fleck Dance Theatre
207 Queen's Quay W
harbourfrontcentre.com
proartedanza.com

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