

'I'm the luckiest person'

Surrey native
Alex Wong now a
principal soloist
with Miami City
Ballet

by Sheila Reynolds

When he started dancing at age seven, Alex Wong likely never imagined he'd be a soloist on stages on the other side of the continent.

But at age 22, there he is, living and working in Florida.

Wong has called the Sunshine State home since 2005, when he landed a spot with Miami City Ballet as a member of the company's corps. Having spent the past two years as a soloist, just weeks ago the Surrey native was promoted to principal soloist – one of just three in the company.

Always dedicated to improving his art, the news was more than welcome.

"I was definitely aspiring to move up the ranks," he said by phone from his adopted hometown of Miami Beach this week. "I like having something to work for."

Wong moved to Surrey when he was 12 and trained at the Goh Ballet Academy in Vancouver while attending North Surrey Secondary for two years before transferring to a half-day program at McGee Secondary.

The dancer's big break came when, at 17, he took first place at one of the most prestigious ballet competitions in the world, the Prix de Lausanne, in Switzerland. Along with a cash prize, he won an apprenticeship scholarship at the dance school of his choosing.

He picked the American Ballet Theatre (ABT) in New York City.

"I went there because [it] is the best in North America," he recalls of the

tough decision

he had to make as a teen. "So it was like a dream. I always looked up to the dancers."

Straight out of high school, living in Manhattan and taking in all the arts and culture New York has to offer, the year-long experience was invaluable. It was his directors at ABT who suggested he audition for Miami Ballet.

"I didn't know that much about the company back then. But I really liked the class when I went to audition – I had a really good vibe," he says of the company, which is comprised of between 50 and 60 dancers. "Even with so many dancers, it's very supportive. We all act as a family."

Fortunately, Wong doesn't have trouble adjusting to new environments, although it took some time to acclimatize to Miami's often extreme heat. But he's grown used to the sunny days and there's a good beach a few blocks from his home.

"Not too hard to get used to," he says, adding he usually returns to Surrey for a visit with his family twice a year.

As for work, Wong and his fellow dancers are on the clock six days a week, rehearsing Tuesday through Thursday and performing Friday through Sunday weekly, with shows rotating through four "home" city theatres in Miami Beach, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and Naples.

He also teaches jazz and takes the occasional hip hop class. Still, even with just one day off per week, Wong never feels overloaded.

"It's not really work. I haven't really worked a day

in my life," he laughs.

In fact, he says, virtually everything has gone his way since he finished school and he couldn't have asked for more.

"I'm the luckiest person – I get to do what I love and I get paid to do it."

He'd still like to climb a level – to principal dancer – with Miami City Ballet, but has plenty of other things he wants to achieve. There's always Broadway, for example, and a couple of TV shows have sparked his interest.

"I still want to do so much more. I'm keeping my eyes open and seeing what there is."

A recently issued green card (U.S. Permanent Resident card) opens those doors even wider.

"Now I can work at Starbucks in the States!" he jokes.

Photo by Lucrecia Diaz

sreynolds@surreyleader.com