



# LESLIE BOWMAN

## Zooming to the Top

By Jenny Stevenson

**Once he starts talking, it's not hard to fathom how this young man from Naenae ended up with a substantial scholarship to one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious dance training schools at the tender age of 15. Dance, and more especially tap, is Leslie Garcia Bowman's passion and he is not afraid to show it.**

Despite a mantelpiece that is crammed with trophies and a wall hung with many ribbons, Leslie is a remarkably modest young man and must be persuaded to volunteer information on what each award is for. But for his most recent achievement - a scholarship awarded for three years of training at Laine's Theatre School in Surrey - he still professes a sense of disbelief: "I remember how much it costs for the course in London and that I (will get) it all for free", he says.



LESLIE BOWMAN  
PHOTO: BERNARDO VELASCO

Forced to make the choice between that option and an opportunity to train at Brent Street's Talent Development High School in Sydney - there was really no contest for Leslie and his parents. Laine's graduates are usually assured of work in London's notoriously fickle entertainment industry - by virtue of Miss Laine's long-standing reputation and her insistence on remarkably high standards of training. One such prominent graduate from the school is Victoria Beckham.

It quickly becomes apparent that the prospect of such a rigorous course doesn't faze Leslie at all - in fact he seems to relish the likelihood of coming up against some tough competition, in order to more fully extend himself. His parents, Diana and Stewart Bowman, have always solidly supported Leslie - to the extent that Diana gave up her full-time employment to help him and now works as a nanny because of the compatible hours. They will take advantage of Stewart's British passport to live and work in the UK while Leslie is training.

Leslie is quick to give credit to his teachers for his achievements: Jeanette Mullins, Lynn and Art Noanoa and Mary Rogers. He also modestly attributes his success to mentor Anthony Cranwell who worked in New Zealand last year and now teaches at Laines - "he's really the reason I got a scholarship".

Leslie stays in contact with Anthony by email or Facebook every few days - with Anthony sending him exercises to do and advising him on what needs improving. Leslie describes the tough work-outs that were the norm when he was working with Anthony, who would say to him "If you're tired, do more... jump higher"!

Anthony says of his young protégé: "There is no doubt that Leslie has talent, but it is the potential in his talent and his mature attitude to improving that I found most inspiring to work with. His awareness of

his weaknesses and (his) intention to strengthen them will ensure that he maximises his current potential. For this reason I felt I had to recommend him to Laine Theatre Arts where his natural ability will be trained to a professional and employable standard. He is very charismatic on stage, which shows that he loves to perform and will win over an audience, his peers and teachers alike. I am proud of what he has achieved already in the last year, but excited to see what he will achieve in the future"

From an early age, Leslie was inspired by his cousin, Jason Garcia Jowett, who is now performing overseas as a professional dancer. Last year, Jason worked for Millenium Entertainment International in Dubai, Hong Kong, Macau, the Philippines and Singapore and has just finished doing a show for Jason Coleman in Australia. Jason says of his



cousin Leslie, "He is going to do so well. He is a very talented boy and I am so proud of him".

Leslie has performed on the competition circuit from a very young age and believes it is an excellent way in which to gain confidence as a performer. His mother, Diana, recalls how, at a very young age, Leslie became upset at coming second and missing out on winning a trophy, but that this immediately became a motivating factor for him to practise. Leslie has also worked on polishing his singing voice and was very pleased to recently be placed second in an adult competition for Elvis Impersonators.

A few years ago, he was also chosen for the role of Billy Elliot for the Sydney show, but in the interval between the audition and the start of the show he had a sudden growth spurt and grew too tall for the part. Other highlights have included winning the 2007 "Australian Dancer of the Year Award" at the National Dance Championships in the Gold Coast, where he was placed 3rd in the whole of Australia; and being praised by Lucas Newland of Sydney's Brent Street Studios who stated: "he can be the face of Australia's Performing Arts – he's got the look, he can sing and he can dance".

Happily, Leslie won't be the only New Zealander at Laines. Young dancer Alannah Matthews from New Plymouth, who recently graduated with a Diploma in Commercial Dance from Whitireia Performing Arts, will join him there for one year at least. Alannah tells how she also received encouragement from Anthony Cranwell:

"I was fortunate to meet Anthony last year whilst training at WPAC and was asked to audition.....I want to be the best dancer that I can be and that to me means being trained by and with the best, and I believe Laines will be a step in the right direction to achieving this."

The two young dancers will be joining another WPAC graduate, Tara Lee Randell from Ngaruawahia, who is currently completing her training at the school.

Commercial Dance is one area of the dance industry where performers can and do get regular paid work. There is little doubt that these young dancers will number among the success stories. In Leslie's case, it is evident that his capacity for hard work, coupled with the fact that he is completely comfortable about who he is and devoid of pretension or guile - augers well for a stellar career in the future. ■



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