

W

hat she did for love

By Esme Mazzeo

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Ariana Debose made it to the Top 20 in Fox's *So You Think You Can Dance*

"We'd rehearse all day," she says, "[but] within that time span you have your rehearsal with the choreographers...and then you have the filming of the interviews. You'll do an interview by yourself, and then your partner will do an interview, and then the choreographers have interviews, and then they film you interacting with the choreographers."

All of behind the scenes work leaves only about five hours to learn a routine with the choreographers, which makes for a rather unnatural experience. "No one is going to feel comfortable with a camera in their face all the time. You feel awkward and I felt stupid, but that's reality television. TV is not reality."

The experience, though, has opened many doors for Debose. "It's a lot easier for me to go into auditions in New York City," says Debose. But she adds "What I feel like people get confused about is when dancers do the show, things don't automatically become easier for you. You still have to go on auditions but... sometimes you'll walk in and they'll recognize you and they'll be like, 'Oh, I know she can dance, let's see what she can do -- if she'll fit in to what I'm looking for.'"

Debose's feelings while filming footage for the show are a marked contrast from her feelings while she is actually dancing. "When I'm dancing I feel free, I feel larger than life, but I also feel very vulnerable. That's what makes it beautiful and makes me the happiest."

Her love for dance transcends her personal emotions, though. It is rooted in the way dance can create unity. "I love dance because it's like a universal language," Debose says. "It's a way for every culture, every ethnicity to speak clearly, and a way for all of us to be heard. You can say anything, and there is no judgment in it."

Succeeding as a dancer is not easy. "It's not going happen overnight," she says.

Actor Terrance Mann (the original Rum Tum Tugger in *Cats* and Javert in *Les Miserables*,) once told Debose to, "reach big, but if you fall, don't be afraid of it. You get back up and you try again because the day that you quit trying again is the day you're done."

Debose does reach big. "Before I die I want to dance on Broadway, I want to climb Mt. Everest and I want to get married and have kids."

Late in *A Chorus Line*, which is set at the dance audition for a new, unnamed musical, the characters are posed with the question "if today was the day you had stop dancing, how would you feel?" The result is the iconic number "What I Did for Love."

Even with the daunting prospect of rehabilitating her broken ankle lies ahead of her, Debose knows this injury is not the end of her career. She continued performing the final number.

"Without dance," she says. "I am not content."

What she did for love, indeed.

Dancer Ariana Debose's ankle snapped during a performance of the musical *A Chorus Line* at Western Carolina University's College of Fine and Performing Arts in March.

The next day, she told *Pulse*, "I am so glad that I gave everything I had and that I was so in the moment [last night]. [Now] I am going to have to fight to be able to do what I love."

Much of the 19-year-old's career has been a fight. Debose received a big break of sorts on the sixth season of *So You Think You Can Dance*, but was eliminated by the judges after making it to the top 20.

She took a positive out of the experience, though. "My goal was to get to Vegas Week [a semi-final round]," she says. "Everything after that was a cherry on top."

Even though she spent just a few weeks on the show, Debose got a sense of just how unreal reality television is.



Ariana spent eight hours a day learning routines for the show in a studio much like this one.