

Dressed to thrill

Young Post - Sports

February 15, 2013



Dancer Stephanie Tung shows off one of her dance costumes.

Photo: Edmond So/SCMP

Stephanie Tung knows the perfect steps to wow dance judges - and how to cut a dash in her own outfits

By Kevin Kung

Dancing and dressmaking may sound somewhat unrelated, but Stephanie Tung Cheuk-yin excels in both and aims to continue doing them together as a career.

Stephanie, a Latin dancer, is in Form Six at Lam Tai Fai College. She is a representative of both the Asia Dance Sport Council and the Hong Kong Ballroom Dancing Council. She is also a designer of dance dresses.

The versatile 18-year-old started ballet classes when she was in kindergarten. When she was in Form Two, she started learning Latin dancing, and bought a dress from the mainland for the activity.

"I found that many dancers were wearing the same dress in competitions," Stephanie says. "I wanted to have variety, not repetitive designs."

Stephanie then started to order tailor-made dresses. Her mother was encouraged by the two tailors who made one of Stephanie's outfits, and opened Sparkle Dance Apparel Company, where local dancers could buy dance costumes with unique designs. At the same time, Stephanie was inspired by a school fashion show.

"I was in Form Three and, after watching the show, I found that I was interested in clothing design," she says. "The opening of my mum's company came at the right time and gave me the chance to design dresses of my own."

When making a dress, Stephanie starts by drawing out the concept behind the dress and the basic cut. Then the plan is passed to the tailors and the core part of the dress is produced. Finally, Stephanie adds crystals and other decorations.

Stephanie faced some difficulties when she first started out. "I focused too much on the appearance of the dress and some of my designs were impractical," she says. "For example, I drafted a stunning dress which would show part of the dancer's back. But the tailor told me that the design lacked support and the dancer may accidentally show her underwear when in action. Now, I strive for a balance between practicality and design."

Since then, Stephanie has produced dozens of dance costumes, but only five dresses have been for herself. The others were made for fellow dancers, with even her direct dance competitors approaching her for help. Stephanie now gets paid by them to create beautiful dresses.

"I feel great when I see other dancers wearing my work ... it's like my own fashion show," says Stephanie. "I always listen to my clients' comments and feedback, and do my best."

"I don't think their beautiful dresses threaten my chances of winning. After all, the judges will evaluate our performance primarily based on our skills and our performance. The dresses are just a bonus."

Stephanie makes costumes for dancers of all ages, from three-year-olds to adults.

During peak season, usually over the summer holiday, she sometimes has to work overnight to finish all her orders.

"The busiest period was last summer," she says. "There were so many competitions taking place. I had to complete six dresses in just three weeks. Luckily, my clients are patient, as they know I have to practise for competitions, too."

Stephanie says one of her most challenging jobs so far was producing a set of costumes for a school team with more than 30 students.

"There were boys and girls in the team, and every dancer had a different build," she says. "I took each of their measurements in person and marked down their characteristics. It was challenging to design and produce costumes that could make everyone look good."

Stephanie wants to turn dance costume design into her lifelong career after graduating from university.

At the moment, she is trying something new in terms of outfit design.

"I have a new partner, Donald Mak Chor-wang," Stephanie says. "I seldom make suits for male dancers, but I am going to design one for Donald, and hopefully he will look fantastic dancing beside me."