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Ryan Grainger, standing right, performs with British singer Rita Ora in New York City in 2018. Grainger is a commercial dancer, the type that appears in music videos and on tours, dancing backup for many big-name stars. **RYAN GRAINGER**

Jock finds true calling as commercial dancer

KATHRYN GREENAWAY

Ryan Grainger was a jock until dance caught his attention in his mid-teens. When he walked into his first hip-hop dance class he was the only boy, he but kept on going. In secret. A jock dancing? What could that possibly mean? Grainger, who grew up in Beaconsfield, had the talent and the determination and ended up in Los Angeles where he's been living for the last six years, modelling, touring internationally and dancing in television and film. The day after he spoke to the West Island Gazette, he was booked to shoot an episode of the Netflix series *Lucifer*.

During the interview, he talked about a television incident in August which shot him back to his early days of uncertainty.

ABC Good Morning America host Lara Spencer mocked six-year-old Prince George after hearing his father Prince William say his son loved ballet class. In that moment, the old stigma about "sisy dancers" reared its ugly head one more time.

The backlash was fierce, with male dancers taking to the streets in New York to demand an apology for her archaic comment. Spencer did apologize.

If there was a silver lining, it

was that the incident served to get people talking about what it took to become a great dancer and that dancers were, in fact, elite athletes with incredible skill.

Grainger is a commercial dancer, the type you see in music videos, dancing backup for big stars. Commercial dance may not have the same stigma attached to it as ballet, but it still demands a measure of courage for a boy to take that first step.

Grainger remembers wondering what his family and friends would think of his dream to become a professional dancer? "I remember being extremely nervous," he said during an interview from L.A. "I felt all the things every boy would feel."

He said the important thing to do for any young boy who might be drawn to the dance studio is to block out the negative noise. "Even if it's scary, you can't stop doing it if it's what you love to do," he said.

In the end, both family and friends were completely supportive of Grainger's decision to pursue dance. His grandmother, a ballet dancer in her youth, was a particular fan of the idea. He took the plunge and things worked out.

Top of his bucket list six years ago was to tour with a major star. Tours with Taiwanese pop star A-mei and then Ricky Martin ticked that box.

After the Ricky Martin tour ended, Grainger enrolled at UCLA and completed an associate degree in film and television production by attending night classes. He juggled his professional responsibilities and studies as best he could. He missed a few classes when work took him to Italy to do a fashion show for Dolce & Gabbana, but he managed to catch up.

The associate degree landed Grainger a job as creative director for Pequeños Gigantes, a TV talent show in Mexico. (The bilingual Quebecer picked up Spanish touring with Martin and during his three months in Mexico City.)

"I loved the experience," he said. "I think being a performer gives me an advantage over other producers because I've been in so many shows, I understand the difference between a quality production and just a production."

He returns to Mexico in March for another season as creative director on the same show.

Grainger just got back from Vancouver, following a month-long shoot of the Netflix original series *Julie and the Phantom*, directed by Kenny Ortega (*High School Musical*).

"It was a dream of mine to work with Kenny Ortega," the 26-year-old said. Another box ticked.

So what's next?

"I would like to dance in a full-fledged dance movie, along the lines of *West Side Story* or *Cats*," Grainger said. "You can't stop doing what you love."

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