



DARING DANCE DREAM. Ballet dancer Amiruddin Shah practices before a performance in Mumbai, India. The 15-year-old son of a welder from a Mumbai slum has won a spot at the prestigious American Ballet Theatre's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School in New York. Shah was doing backflips and contemporary dance when his Israeli-American instructor first discovered his talent. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade)

Teenage boy from Mumbai slum dances way to N.Y. ballet school

By Manish Mehta
The Associated Press

MUMBAI, India — The son of a welder from the city's slums had a dream few Indians dared to dream — to dance with the New York City Ballet.

In a few months, that dream may be a little bit closer as 15-year-old Amiruddin Shah begins four years of training at the prestigious American Ballet Theatre's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School.

"I never thought I would become a ballet dancer," Shah said, though he knew from the age of six that he loved to move with music. "India is not on the ballet map, and I want to take India to an even higher level."

Shah began studying ballet less than three years ago when Israeli-American instructor Yehuda Maor was invited by the Danceworx Academy to teach in India — a country with no special ballet academies.

Maor happened to catch Shah doing cartwheels and backflips as part of the Danceworx jazz and contemporary dance program for underprivileged students.

"I had no idea about ballet," Shah recalled. He had been dancing freestyle whenever he got the chance — sometimes he was invited to weddings to perform, sometimes he just goofed around with friends.

Maor was impressed with how Shah moved and asked to see the bottom of Shah's feet. He discovered the boy had perfect arches for ballet and urged him to train.

After U.K. handover, Hong Kong in uneasy transition

HONG KONG (AP) — Twenty years since the handover of power from Britain to China, Hong Kong remains a place undergoing an uneasy transition.

At midnight on June 30, 1997, the British colonial administration relinquished control of the Asian financial center to Hong Kong's new rulers, China's communist leaders.

With a new "Basic Law" constitution and a framework known as "one country, two systems," Hong Kongers were promised they could keep their capitalist way of life, including western-style civil liberties and considerable autonomy, for 50 years. However, many residents are increasingly concerned about



ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS? This June 27, 2017 photo made with a "tilt-shift" lens shows Chinese and British flags during the ceremony of the handover of Hong Kong to China on July 1, 1997, as part of a display at an exhibit in Hong Kong. Two decades since Beijing took control of Hong Kong, China's rising influence — and Britain's waning profile — are impossible to ignore. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)

mainland China's rising influence in Hong Kong. They worry Beijing is backtracking on its promises, putting their way of life under threat.

Mainland China's growing profile amid lingering signs of the British colonial

Within two-and-a-half years, Shah had nailed his pointe, pirouette, and arabesque, "which is unheard of," Maor said.

"I knew I had found a diamond in a pile of rocks," said the teacher, acknowledging that his pupil now "needs to be challenged" by more teachers. Maor bought Shah ballet shoes and dance clothes and helped him and another young dancer, 21-year-old Manish Chauhan, win scholarships in June to New York's Joffrey Ballet School. But they could not secure U.S. visas in time.

Shah and Chauhan were then offered scholarships at the Oregon Ballet Theater starting in December. Shah attended for three months, while Chauhan is still training in Portland.

Now, Shah is trying to raise funds for four years of travel and tuition with the American Ballet Theatre in New York. They have enough for his first year, beginning in August, but have set up a website to accept donations for three more years in the U.S.

Shah said he is eager to stay in a dormitory and "be in a proper ballet school."

"I am so excited, but slightly scared, too," said Shah, who speaks basic English but used Hindi in an interview with The Associated Press. "How would I interact with people? New York is very crowded."

One day, he hopes to be a principal dancer in the New York Ballet.

And eventually, he said, "I want to teach other children who cannot afford to pay for dance."

era are seen in photos by Associated Press photographer Vincent Yu, who used a "tilt-shift" lens to accentuate certain elements of the image and provide a new perspective.

Chinese symbols like

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