



STEP, SHUFFLE, KICK... Wanna-be hoofers patiently await their moment to shine.

TANYA BRAGANTI

# In her SHOES

BY BREANNE L. HELDMAN

**W**hat? Dance? Me? I never imagined myself the next Chita Rivera, Twyla Tharp or even a female Wade Robson.

I did, however, think I had some moves, and with my editor encouraging me (or was that pushing?), I found myself outside early Thursday morning, waiting to audition for the second season of "So You Think You Can Dance."

The Fox reality series is a 12-week competition to find America's best undiscovered dancer — read "American Idol" for groovers and shakers. A hit last summer, the series landed at the top of its time slot, and its winner, Nick Lazzarini, and runnerup Melody Lacayanga scored jobs with Mark Meisner's Los Angeles-based company, Evolution.

With only two days until tryout (and I hadn't taken regular dance classes in at least eight years), I was at a slight disadvantage.

Having scheduled studio space, I called in a pro — modern-dance choreographer and performer Eve Chalom — to help turn a few moves into a routine. I selected the song "Nth Degree" by Morningwood for its upbeat tempo and rock-pop sensibility.

Thursday morning, the alarm went off at 5:45 — plenty of time to review steps and head to the Hilton Theatre in Times Square.

Arriving at the 43rd St. entrance at 7 a.m., I found the line snaking around the block already, and they wouldn't be letting anyone inside until 9! More surprising, though, were the folks at the front of the line, including Marcus Hurston, 21, from Yonkers, who had queued up at 10 p.m. Wednesday.

"It was freezing cold and you can't sleep out here, but I'm here for a reason," the self-taught artist said. "Dancing is my life. I might

**Daily News reporter struts her stuff for TV's latest dance-off**

as well show somebody else my talent and see where it gets me."

His enthusiasm was impressive, but when it started snowing flake-clusters the size of cotton balls, I just wanted to go somewhere — anywhere — to warm up. When someone from Fox announced that we had to change clothes and stretch outside, a different kind of warmup occupied our thoughts.

Dan Karaty, one of the show's choreographers, made me feel a little better.

"In the first round, the biggest thing they're looking for is personalities," he said. "We want everything from hip-hop dancers to ballroom dancers to tap dancers, and we want people who are going to be fun and interesting on camera."

Feeling slightly more confident, I struck up conversations with my neighbors to pass the time. Most had amped up on classes to prepare, but Marc Suznovich, 25, a medical student, took a different approach, watching movies like "Center Stage" and "Save the Last Dance" for inspiration.

At 10:15, we were herded into the building and separated into two audition groups.

But once inside, my confidence took a flat-footed turn as I heard a loop of Rihanna's "Pon de Replay," Black Eyed Peas' "Pump It" and Pussycat Dolls' "Don't Cha." It was an improvisational contest. My carefully choreographed routine was not going to cut it.

Leah Deabre, 24, a teacher in the Bronx, tried to allay my fears as we stretched. "It ain't no thing," she reminded me with a smile. "A good dancer can dance to anything."

At noon, 10 of us were sent into the audi-



NERVOUS? ME? Our intrepid reporter stretches before taking her turn.

tion arena, where a producer would point us in and out of the center of the floor for 30 seconds of solo moves. His pretty purple sweater didn't fool anyone — we knew he would be tough, and my self-assurance was now in the orchestra pit.

As "Pump It" blasted from the stereo, I made a mental note of what my first few steps should be. I hit the middle and began with gusto. But, when those planned tricks were finished, my ability to think on my feet literally disappeared.

I rolled, jumped, kicked and spun, but all I really remember is feeling my hair in my face and knowing my "Fame" moment had passed. Fifteen minutes? Those 30 seconds felt like a lifetime.

Afterward, the producer lined us up and handed magical yellow slips of paper to those who would go on to the next round. Needless to say, I didn't receive one (but Deabre did, and she deserved it!)

At least 300 people auditioned that chilly Thursday. I'll be looking for Deabre's face when "So You Think You Can Dance" premieres on May 25.

As for me, maybe I'll try the "Last Comic Standing" auditions on Tuesday ... ♦



MAKEUP MAGIC Raquel Mendes, 20, of Perth Amboy, N.J., preps.