

Nick Drago competed on Bravo's *Step It Up and Dance* and has appeared in several big and small screen roles

Dedicated Dancer

Cy-Fairian Nick Drago Follows His Artistic Dream

Written by Nancy Wozny Select Photos by Marisa Hugonnett

Nick Drago may not have won Bravo's *Step it Up and Dance*, but he's continuing to make a name for himself as Cy-Fair's most famous dancer. After wowing the judges on the 2008 reality dance show, Drago has been working steadily in film, television, and the competition circuit. "The show gave me a voice," says Drago, adding, "Although I am not sure I would do reality television again."

Stepping into the Spotlight

Step it Up's resident mentor Jerry Mitchell felt Drago made his mark week after week. "He's a great dancer, very technical, incredible at hip hop, and just the kind of dancer I like to work with," says Mitchell, a Tony award-winning Broadway choreographer. "I think he will take the most from the experience. He's just so solid. I have no doubt we will be seeing a lot more of Nick."

Mitchell was right. If Drago looks familiar, it's because you may have seen him on the small screen in shows like *Scrubs* and *How I Met Your Mother*, performing with celebrities from Mariah Carey to UK musician Jem, or in one of several roles on The History Channel, Comedy Central, VH1, The Idea Network, and NBC.

This spring, he takes to the big screen as J. Edgar in *The Oogieloves in the Big Balloon Adventure*. "I play a big, giant vacuum cleaner. It's very fun and I love to act," says Drago. "I want to be the person in the scene who makes something happen; not just a dancer in the background." He strives to continually expand his skill set and urges young dancers to do the same by exploring singing and acting. "When you stop learning, it's all over," he says.

Creative Beginnings

Drago began dancing when he was only 4 years old, taking lessons from Angela Jackson at the American Academy of Dance. As a teen, he began studying with Ce Ce White at Progressions Performing Arts, where he danced with the American Jazz Dance Company. Drago credits both White and Jackson for his strong background and training. "Angela ran a strict ballet program, which I loved, and Ce Ce exposed us to so many different types of teachers, many from [Los Angeles]," he says. "So by the time I moved there, I knew all the key players." His Houston credits include performing as a member of the WNBA Comets dance team, NRG, lead roles in *Guys and Dolls*, *Oklahoma*, and *The Music Man* with the Houston Regional Theatre, and 18 years as a senior company member with the Houston Dance Theatre.

After graduating from Cypress Creek High School in 1999, Drago headed off to Oklahoma City University, where he earned a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in 2003. "I am glad I went to college. I not only grew as a dancer, but matured as a person," he says, "I knew L.A. would still be there when I got out."

Art in the Family

Born into an artistic family, Drago's parents, Anthony and Gale Drago, have supported him from the start. His mother is a published author and his father paints, with his work found in buildings across Houston.



Drago currently teaches jazz and hip hop classes with Tremaine Dance Conventions



Anthony, Gale, and Nick Drago outside their Cy-Fair home



Drago enjoys the chance to teach local dance students through the organization Flow 40

On Screen Credits

Catch Nick Drago in these productions:

- ★ MTV's Video Music Awards
- ★ Music video for Finger Eleven's Paralyzer
- ★ Music video for Jessica Simpson's Boots
- ★ Music video for One Republic's All the Right Moves
- ★ Scrubs
- ★ Spike TV's Guy's Choice Awards
- ★ Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles
- ★ The Hollow Men
- ★ Step It Up and Dance
- ★ How I Met Your Mother
- ★ Alvin and the Chipmunks as Theodore's dance double



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Drago believes he gets his perfectionist streak from his father. "He understands the arts, and we share the same principles concerning working hard but following your gut," Drago says. "From my mother, I learned sentence structure. I know that sounds funny, but she is so good with words and when I was a kid she read to me with the most expressive voice."

Drago also appreciates how his mother always kept his dancing in perspective. "If I went to a competition and did not win, she would remind me that I danced well, didn't fall down, and that the audience enjoyed it. Ten years from now, will it really matter whether or not I won?" Resilience, a key survival tactic for any artist, was instilled into him by both his parents. "When life throws a curve ball, you take it and move on," he says. "If I didn't make an audition, it's time to wonder what I could have done better. I always need to be learning. I get that from both my parents."

Gale Drago remembers the moment Nick caught dance fever. "After watching Footloose he wanted to learn how to dance," she says. "I had no idea he would get so involved. Before long, we had a second family of dance friends. There were so many fun parts to being a dance mom." Gale keeps up with Nick's career, and especially enjoyed the Bravo show. "We don't get to see him much, so having him in our living room once a week was kind of surreal," she says. "The phone started to ring and we reconnected with many of our old dance friends." Today, Nick and his mom talk nearly every day. "He calls for career advice, but he usually winds up making his own decisions," she says.

The Dance Goes On

As a headline jazz and hip-hop teacher on a 25-city tour with Tremaine Dance Conventions, Drago tries to pass his strong work ethic down to ballrooms full of young dancers. He competed with Tremaine when he was coming up in the ranks, and considers founder Joe Tremaine a personal mentor. "Joe told me to go to college and I'm glad I did," Drago says. "He has the greatest stories; he's worked with everyone in film and television."

Right now, Drago is enjoying the performing life, but down the road, he might consider trying his hand as a choreographer. "I love being in front of the camera," he says. "I tell my students to be versatile, do everything."

Drago also runs Flow 40, a training organization that extends the convention experience by bringing top teachers right into studios. With a faculty of 13 teachers, Flow 40 has been offering a flexible format that supplements the traditional convention and competition experience. Local studios including Dance Central, Dance Masters, and Abbott's Performing Arts Center are big Flow 40 fans. "The cool thing is I have been able to come back, see my family, and connect to the people of Houston," he says. "I love the giving back part."

If you know of an interesting Cy-Fairian you'd like to read more about, email editor@cyfairmagazine.com. CFM

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