

# Vegas Strip

It's a 'dirty' job, but these male dancers will gladly do it

BY CAROLINE FONTEIN  
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You won't find sequins or feathers at these dance revues. What you will see are hard-bodied hunks wearing thongs and knee pads.

As much as showgirls have become an icon in Vegas, performers in all-male revues are also a mainstay on the Las Vegas Strip. Since 2002, "Chippendales" and "Thunder From Down Under" have called Vegas home, paving the way for other all-male revues including "Men of X" and "American Storm."

Dancing for crowds of screaming women, tearing off a white tank top and maintaining a muscular physique probably doesn't sound like a job. But in the case of a male dancer, it's all in a day's work.

For James Wilcox transitioning from teaching health and physiology classes at Johns Hopkins Medical School to joining "Chippendales" was all part of the plan.

Performing in the show was on Wilcox's bucket list. During a layover in Vegas, he finally decided to see what "Chippendales" at the Rio was all about. Despite his desire to be in the show he said he expected to see a bunch of "cheesy strippers."

"By the end of the opening number I was blown away... I knew at that point that I wasn't going to be a teacher for too much longer. Then I just had to figure out how to get hired because I had no dance background and I didn't know exactly what they were looking for," said Wilcox.

With five and a half years of working as a Naval Officer under his belt and his experience as a personal trainer, the fitness part came easy. Even the stripping aspect of the show wasn't a challenge for him.

"I've always been very comfortable with my body. While I was personal training and teaching at Johns Hopkins I was a body builder. Standing in front of large crowds wearing very little is something that I had learned to not only not be embarrassed or shy about, but to actually enjoy and feed off of," said Wilcox.

Despite having the right physique, it took Wilcox about a year and a half to get hired as a Chippendale, during which time he took dance classes. He was the only performer hired for the Las Vegas cast over a three-year period.

"That speaks partly to the quality of the performers and the scrutiny that anyone who makes it in the Las Vegas show should expect to go through," said Wilcox.

Other requirements for every lead Chippendale in the Vegas show are a height of more than six feet tall, a perfect smile, dance ability and a visible six pack.

"If that six-pack starts slipping to a four-pack, if you start losing those abs, people notice. We hang out seven nights a week. You



get to know each other very well, and you'll notice if somebody is not doing their part to stay in top physical condition," said Wilcox.

Being a Chippendale means more to him than just performing on stage. Through the show he also gets to work with local charities including five different events that he did during the summer.

"I never would have thought I'd say this, but all the jobs I've had, I'd say just short of the military, this is the job that I feel like I've been able to contribute the most to my community or the country on the whole, and that always feels good," said Wilcox.

While Wilcox is married, he explained that for single Chippendales one of the main job perks is meeting women after the show in the Flirt Lounge and "other destination points."

"I personally don't know too much about that, but we do hear the stories," said Wilcox.

Matthew Fardell who's been in "Thunder From Down Under" for the past 10 years, described performing as a male dancer as a "dream job."

"You get to travel to 14 different countries and see the world with a bunch of different guys and live by your own rules" said Fardell. He performed with the touring cast before joining the first "Thunder From Down Under" cast in Vegas seven years ago, which eventually moved to its current home at the Excalibur.

Prior to that, he was working towards his master's degree in physical science and had a job at a fitness center. One of the performers from "ManPower," as the show was called in Australia, came into the gym for a short-term membership and asked Fardell if he was interested in being in the show.

It wasn't something he had ever considered before, but with the show's good reputation in Australia he decided to give it a shot and sent in some photos. Two weeks later he was interviewing with the show's owner.

Fardell was always into fitness so having the right body for the job came naturally.

"Dancing was the hardest part for me and getting

used to taking your clothes off on stage in front of a whole bunch of people is, ah, I come from a small country town of 500 people, so it wasn't the obvious step," said Fardell.

Aside from learning the dance routines and staying in shape, Fardell explained that having a sense of humor is an important part of being in the show.

"We're not a bump and grind show where we're all serious about ourselves. There's a lot of choreography and a lot of jokes. Our emcee is hilarious. It's just a good fun night," said Fardell.

Personality is a big factor when auditioning new talent, all of which is done in Australia. A guy can have a great body and be a talented dancer but if they aren't good with the public then they can't be in the show.

"Frankly, we're looking for guys that aren't d---heads. That's the number one criteria. You have to be able to mix easily with people of all ages and backgrounds," said Fardell.

The interactive element of all-male revues is something that only male dancers have to deal with, explained producer Angela Stabile. She used to dance in "Crazy Girls" and has created both all-female and all-male revues with her husband, including "X Burlesque" at Flamingo and "Men of X" at Hooters.

In "Men of X" the performers go into the audience to say hello to and dance with women in the crowd.

"[The customers] actually touch their chest and that never happens with the girls. It's definitely a double standard," said Stabile.

In "American Storm" at V Theater, men have to pass a psychological interview as part of the audition process, explained performer Tony Cress. This is to determine why guys want to be in the show and if they can handle interacting with women in the audience.

Cress became a member of "American Storm" through the reality television show "StripSearch" on VH1. Before that, he was working as a bartender and personal trainer in Chicago. Not only did he have to get comfortable with removing his clothes in front of a crowd, he had to do it with a film crew following his every move.

"You basically have to learn to lose most of your inhibitions and not be shy at all, which I kind of am. I'm kind of shy as a person anyway and to go the opposite spectrum it was hard," said Cress.

His twin brother also performs in the show and helped him overcome his apprehensions about performing while wearing a costume that leaves little to the imagination.

"You play it off like you are used to it, but still in the back of your mind you're like, 'I'm naked in front of these people and they expect me to do something cool,'" said Cress.

He explained that being prepared for any unplanned scenarios that might happen during the show, like a woman throwing her panties on stage or flashing the dancers is all part of being a performer.

"You can't break character if someone comes up and pulls your pants down. You just pull them back up, start smiling, laughing and continue on," said Cress.



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