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Deaf Dancers - Need the Internal Beat

13 *WHAM* - February 19, 2008

(Henrietta, N.Y.) - Marlee Matlin has taken the stage as an actress for years, but it's been quite some time since she has done so as a dancer.

When she does, Sarah Clark and Lauren Bain will watch her first steps. "I am excited to see what she can do on the show," Lauren said.

Both girls remember their own first steps taken more than 20 years ago. Both are deaf, professionally-trained, contest contenders.

"You have to act like...you own the dance floor," Sarah said. "It's like, 'This stage is mine. Back off!'"

Sarah's strides have earned her medals, and the right to say that. Matlin will have to learn her favorites: swing and ballroom.

"To tell you the truth, it's really challenging," Sarah said. "Because from my experience knowing ballroom dancing, it tends to be fun and exciting, also hard work."

Lauren's more about hip-hop and funk. She met Matlin as a teen, and spoke with her about dance.

"She encouraged me to keep doing what I was doing," she said. "I was traveling at the time and I was performing internationally and I felt that she was really supportive of me as a deaf person. Really encouraging to go for it...go for my dream."

The dancers say they hope when Matlin takes the stage, it won't just be entertaining - but educational for the hearing community. It may even answer some questions they've received themselves in the past.

"I understand what they're thinking: 'How can they hear the music?' Lauren said. "But I think it's really important to spread the knowledge and educate about deafness in general."

Sarah and Lauren believe all dancers - deaf or not - feel the rhythm inside. They said Matlin will need that internal beat, if she wants to beat the competition.

Rochester Institute of Technology

National Technical Institute for the Deaf

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