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Australian Story – Monday February 19, 8pm, ABC and ABC iview LEAP OF FAITH: Steven McRae and Alexander Campbell

Guest introduction: Li Cunxin, also known as “Mao’s Last Dancer”

From humble beginnings in Western Sydney to London’s Covent Garden, two Australian men have beaten the odds and leapt to the pinnacle of world ballet.

Steven McRae, 32, and Alexander Campbell, 31, have been competing against each other since they were boys when they first came across one other on Sydney’s competitive dance circuit during the 1990s. Their careers have been closely meshed ever since. And now, they’re two of only eight principal dancers at The Royal Ballet.



“To be a principal of the Royal Ballet, you’re the crème de la crème, you’re one of the best dancers in the world,” says Amelia Campbell, Alexander Campbell’s sister

“It’s inevitable that people would compare us... there was a rivalry of sorts, as much as there can be in ballet!” - Alexander Campbell, Principal Dancer, The Royal Ballet

In a story of unlikely success, immense physical challenges and intense rivalry, this *Australian Story* takes viewers behind the scenes to one of the top ballet companies in the world and reveals the pressure and the pain behind the road to the top for both men.

“(Being at the top of) any company but especially the Royal Ballet, the world’s eyes are on you, there is an incredible pressure that you have to live up to... and it can be quite selfish at times,” says David McAllister, the artistic director of the Australian Ballet.

For petrol-head, Steven, and cricket-fanatic, Alexander, it could have been so different. Steven grew up in a family obsessed with motor sport and says he ‘dreamt of becoming a professional drag racer.’ And Alexander’s early promise at cricket, and having a cricket selector for a father, also pointed to a very different career.

The dancers’ success has come at a high personal cost to both men. They’ve overcome career-threatening injuries, as well as quips that boys don’t dance. Leaving their families behind to pursue their dreams when they were just teenagers, both Alexander and Steven have spent half their lives on the other side of the world.

“I wanted it more than anything - that makes me sound a bit of a monster because I had to want it more than my family ... I chose my career over my family,” says Steven McRae.

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