

Aurora's Levitt returns to Baking Show tent just in time for holidays



The excitement of seeing the tent never gets old for Aurora resident Steve Levitt.

When his time in the Great Canadian Baking Show's tent came to an end last year as one of three finalists, he joked to producers he'd simply like to camp out in the tent and be ready to roll for the next season of the popular competition program.

While a camping wasn't possible, Levitt received a sweet Christmas gift from the CBC: one of four places in the network's special The Great Canadian Holiday Baking Show, which airs this Sunday, November 27, at 8 p.m. EST on both the main network and on CBC Gem.

Levitt couldn't believe the news when he first got the call, but as it sunk in, so too did the excitement.

"I was in disbelief that they asked me to come back; I think my exact words were, 'All the cool kids said no and you're stuck with me, huh?'" Levitt jokes. "I was assured [that wasn't the case] but I guess after everything that's gone on, I still have a hard time seeing that baker that other people see me as."

Viewers from across the country were able to see Levitt as the baker fans were quickly able to spot last year as his bakes stood up against many of the best amateur bakers from across the country.

This latest foray into the tent will see him reunited with fellow Season 5 contestant Stephen Nhan, Season 2 alum Mengling Chan, and Season 4's Mahathi Mundluru.

Levitt says he didn't know who was going to be joining him on the holiday special until the day he arrived on set, but once he saw who completed the quartet he says it was a big "fan" moment for him.

"It was great to reunite with Stephen, but to meet Mahathi and Mengling, even though I had been in the tent with superstars, they were the ones I watched when I was trying to get into the tent," says Levitt of his long quest to find his place on the Baking Show. "I said to Mengling, 'I can't believe I'm going to be baking with you,' and she said, 'I can't believe I'm baking with you.' I said, 'I'm just me,' and she said, 'But I'm just me,' you forget that sometimes we fan over each other. It was the same fun I had the first time because, I can only speak for my experience, but it never felt like a competition. Yes, someone was the Star Baker and, yes, someone went home every week, but we were there doing our best and hoping everyone else did their best.

"They couldn't send me home this time (for this one-off special) so that was part of the pressure off, but the 'pressure on' was there

was something at stake; there's a finish line, but the pressure is all self-imposed.?

Levitt is mum on just what bakes added to the pressure he put on himself while filming the special, but says he melded Hanukkah and Christmas traditions, both of which are very important to him, into what they were ultimately asked to create.

?I always say [being in the tent] reminds me of how my wife describes pregnancy; she says it's just a glorious time and then there's that incredible agony as you're giving birth, but when the baby is born it completely disappears, which is probably how we're wired so we'll have more children, but this is similar. In my head, everything in the tent is bliss, happiness and sunshine, just the most magical time and I forget about the stress. The moment I was in there and they said, ?Bake!' it all came whooshing back.

?As I did the first time, I wanted to make sure I brought me and my experiences into the tent. I was brought up Jewish, so there was going to be Hannukah involved in this, but I was also brought up with all of my friends and my dad's wife's family celebrating Christmas, so I was brought up with both holidays and I wanted to make sure I touched on both of those and that's what brings me joy and happiness.?

As the filming went on, Levitt says he tried to ?forget about that whole angsty part of it? and go along for the ride ? something he said he feels he successfully accomplished. Looking back on the experience, he said it was ?all joy? to be back ? perfect for the joyous holiday season ? and learn more about himself, the process, and the fellow contestants he fanboyed over before he gained admission into the tent for the very first time.

?I am a home baker, I am always teaching myself something new,? he says, adding that he and his fellow Season 5 contestants are still maintaining the ties that bind. ?We have grown quite a tight friendship. I think we're looking at how to spend more time together.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter