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# Q and A with rhythmic gymnast Heather Chan

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**Meet Heather Chan**, a 13-year-old rhythmic gymnast from the **L.A. School of Gymnastics** and one of the U.S.'s junior hopefuls for the next quadrennium.

Like many rhythmic gymnasts, Heather fell in love with gymnastics at a young age and started as an artistic gymnast, but quickly made the switch to rhythmic. The change has worked incredibly well for her. "She's definitely one of the school's upcoming talented gymnasts," said L.A. School of Gymnastics Manager **Tanya Berenson**. "We'll probably see more of her name as we get closer to the 2016 Olympics."



*Heather Chan is a 13-year-old U.S. hopeful for the 2016 Olympics in rhythmic gymnastics.  
Credits: Courtesy of the Los Angeles School of Gymnastics*

In the run up to this weekend's prestigious **L.A. Lights Tournament**, I got the opportunity to chat with Heather briefly about the sport, the costumes, and how rhythmic gymnasts stay so darn flexible. **Here's what she had to say:**

**Q:** *Lots of people do soccer or basketball, but there aren't a lot of rhythmic gymnasts. How do you explain the sport to friends who have never seen it?*

**Heather Chan:** "It's a combination of ballet and dance and gymnastics all in one sport. So when you look at this, you see all the beauty, grace, strength, coordination, flexibility, all of these things in one. And it's beautiful."

**Q:** *Do you think rhythmic gymnastics is a misunderstood sport?*

Chan: "Sometimes I think it's misunderstood with artistic gymnastics because once you say rhythmic gymnastics, they say 'Oh is that regular gymnastics?' They don't know the difference."

**Q:** *How did you come to be a rhythmic gymnast? Did you do artistic first?*

**Chan:** "When I was young, I saw a friend doing gymnastics, and over the years I nagged my mom to let me do it too and she finally told me, she'd cut a deal with me. She said if I got all As on my semester report card I'd be able to do gymnastics."

**Q:** *Artistic or rhythmic?*

**Chan:** "At first it was artistic. I did artistic for about four to six weeks and when I was learning a back handspring they said if I did anymore my elbows could break. So I switched."

**Q:** *What did you like about it?*

**Chan:** "I liked the beauty and grace -- and the leotards."

**Q:** *What's a typical day of training like for you?*

**Chan:** "I do three hours of gymnastics. First we jump rope and do ballet to warm up our legs. Then does some conditioning to work strength, then we do stretching and then work elements and jumps. Then there are routines..."

**Q:** *Gymnasts are flexible. Rhythmic gymnasts take it a step farther. How do you get to be so bendy?*

**Chan:** "I usually take five minutes for each leg [in splits]."

**Q:** *Five minutes per leg! And your leg must be up on something like 18 inches high for oversplits, right?*

**Chan:** "Yes."

**Q:** *What are your 2012 goals?*

**Chan:** "My goals for this year are to master all my routines and hopefully get qualified to the Junior Nationals."

**Q:** *Do you have a say in what music goes into your routines?*

**Chan:** "I select my own music and I bring it to the coaches and they see which is best suited for me. All my pieces are classical. I only have one piece that's Middle Eastern -- ribbon."

**Q:** *What about leotards? Who makes them for you? Do you get a hand in the design or selection of your own?*

**Chan:** "Sometimes you get hand-me-downs or you can get customs from the leotard makers. I usually pick out some of the colors that I like and the coach picks out some of the colors she thinks would work. It's a collaboration."

**Q:** *What, in your opinion, is the secret to having a good meet?*

**Chan:** "I always keep in mind just to keep calm. Keep a calm mind."