

Natalie Marrone and The Dance Cure

It's not everyday that you get the opportunity to see a group of talented dancers perform a culturally driven dance that explores the sacred chants of southern Italy. Natalie Marrone and The Dance Cure, Columbus' premiere all female modern dance company, is taking the city and world (the group takes its' tour to Italy this summer) by storm. Natalie Marrone, the founder and artistic director of The Dance Cure, has been surrounded by dance and music her whole life. Now, she brings her passion for the Italian culture and dance to life through Chant Dances, an electrifying dance that embodies southern Italian folk dance and modern day dance.

Most of Natalie Marrone's dance styles stem from her Italian roots. Natalie's father is from a small mountain town called Serremezana, in the region of Campania, and her mother is from Molfetta, which is in Provincia Di Bari, Puglia. Natalie credits her early passion for music and dancing to ritual house cleanings performed by the whole family every Saturday. The Marrones' would make cleaning day fun by singing and dancing to a wide range of music that included Sinatra, Streisand, and Donna Summer.

It's amazing to know that this talented choreographer actually never took dance lessons as a child. Natalie began choreographing at 12 years old with friends by making up dances and convincing her group to perform them at school recitals. By the time she was 16 years old, Natalie was teaching dance to 60 middle school students for the town recreation center when, in fact, she still hadn't taken lessons for herself. Her dance career was taking shape, whether she realized it or not.

A "breakthrough" came when Natalie met some friends in New York City that did hip-hop and she became a part of their group. One day when they were practicing in Columbus Circle, a man entered their circle to dance. He was instantly impressed by Natalie, and challenged her to come study with him. This stranger turned out to be Frank Hatchette, a famous choreographer and teacher at Broadway Dance Center. Natalie was originally going to school to become an attorney, but she decided to follow her heart and enrolled in Broadway Dance Center to cultivate her love for dancing.

After studying in New York City, Natalie returned to Columbus and received her Master of Fine Arts degree in choreography from The Ohio State University in 1998. That same year, she founded The Dance Cure, which is named after the myth of the tarantula's bite. Natalie had gone to Puglia, Italy to research the Tarantella in 1997 and by 1998 was researching its' predecessor dance, the Pizzica Tarantata. This dance stemmed from the Tarantism epidemic throughout the Mediterranean basin in the 15th Century, and the Pizzica Tarantata was a dance performed to heal the bite of the tarantula.

Today, the Dance Cure has six fulltime dancers and four adjunct dancers who will sometimes perform with the group for larger performances. Natalie dances and artistically directs the company. Although she has been choreographing to Italian rhythms for a long time, it was the collaboration with vocalist Michela Musolino that really drew Natalie to work with southern Italian chants and to create Chant Dances.

Chant Dances is the Dance Cure's third evening-length work (which means a performance that is linked together thematically for a full 60-90 minutes). Within Chant Dances there is a Warrior section based on a traditional dance from Salento called the Pizzica Scherma. Fun Pizzica is the last section of Chant Dances, and the movement is based on a courtship dance also from Salento called the Pizzica Corre. The Dance Cure's library of dances include over 70 dances that incorporate modern dance, jazz dance, Latin dance and Italian folk dance. The Dance Cure performs at Italian

festivals throughout the country and specializes in getting the audience dancing traditional dances that came before the Tarantella, like the Tamurriata from Campania and the Pizzica from Salento.

Needless-to-say, Natalie is not only passionate about dance, but also about her Italian heritage. She grew up in an affluent Jewish community where being immigrants and Italian “was not cool.” Her parents raised her to be very American and often times tried to ignore their own Italian accents. As Natalie grew older, being Italian was becoming popular. She noticed herself getting annoyed with restaurants that claimed to serve authentic Italian cuisine (which it wasn’t) and television shows that continually stereotyped Italian-Americans. She began digging into her cultural roots in order to gain an understanding of where these stereotypes were coming from and how she could combat them with intelligence.

Natalie has learned through her own research that many Italian-Americans don’t recognize the music and dance that Dance Cure performs because it pre-dates the mass immigration of the 1900s. Natalie told La Gazzetta that she feels her work is a bridge that links our past to our present Italian-American lives. She is a passionate voice for the Italian culture, and is proud that Chant Dances embraces the old world in a contemporary context, revealing new images of what it means to be Italian-American.

Natalie Marrone and The Dance Cure will be performing Chant Dances on March 11-13, 2004 in the Verne Riffe Center, “Studio 1” Theatre at 8:00 p.m. Group tickets of ten or more are available for \$10 per person for general admission and \$5 for students and senior citizens. Non- group prices are \$16 for general admission and \$10 for students and senior citizens. To purchase your tickets, please call 614-470-3016 or visit their website at www.thedancecure.com