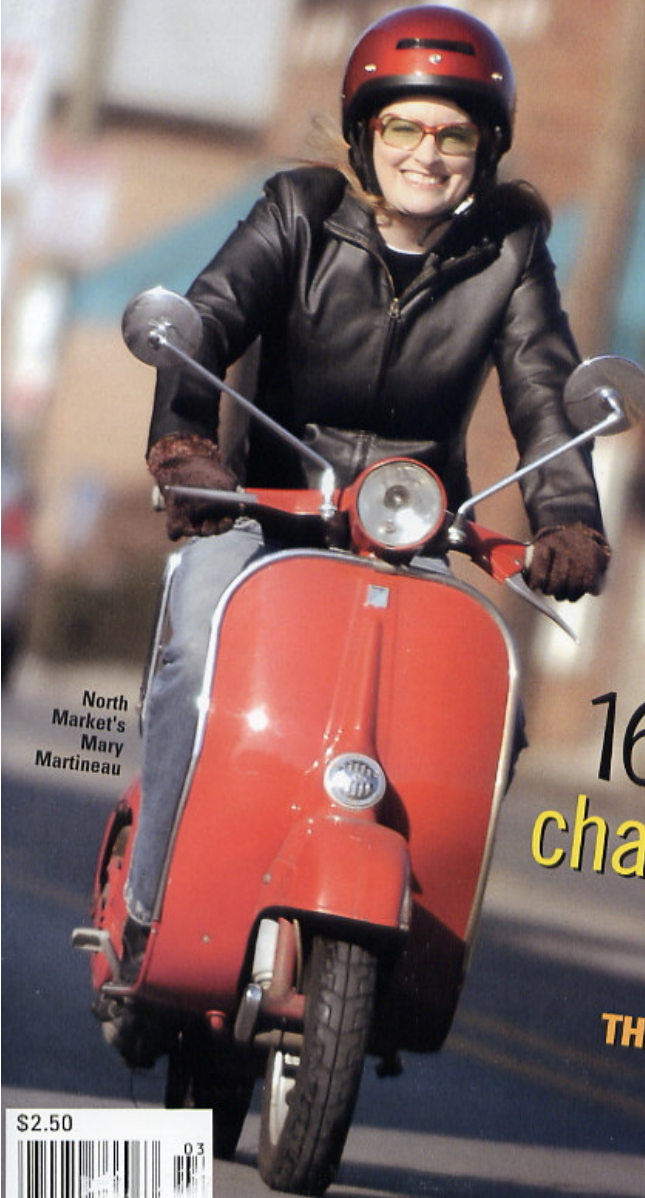


Four stars for BoMA ■ Dublin schools debacle ■ Buddy act: Oden and Conley

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let us play is Bernie's," he says. A New Year's Eve hip-hop show drew about 20 people—mostly friends of the performers. "It was bad," he says, shaking his head and laughing.

During that time, Shepard was living in Cincinnati and coming here to establish his hip-hop reputation. He worked as a computer programmer for Kroger until 2002 before doing music full time—getting national attention while touring and recording under the name Blueprint and as part of another group, Soul Position (with successful hip-hop artist Rjd2, a Columbus native).

He moved to Columbus two years later, and, as he says, "Everything about what I was doing locally started paying off." More artists joined the Weightless label, which got picked up by more retailers, and Shepard, 32, now holds a weekly hip-hop night at Cafe Bourbon Street. The rap scene has been growing steadily, with more clubs hosting hip-hop acts. In fact, Weightless Recordings hosted another New Year's Eve show in 2006, this one at Skully's Music-Diner. It drew almost 500 people.

NATALIE MARRONE

On a mission for dance

As a choreographer and dancer, Marrone, 35, is nothing if not enthusiastic about heightening the profile of dance in Columbus—not only by preparing young dancers for a career, but also involving festivalgoers in group dancing the way it's done in Italy.

In 1998, after graduating with a master's in fine arts from Ohio State, the New Jersey native started her own dance company here, the Dance Cure, which blends traditional Italian folk dances and contemporary dance. The all-female company of four to six dancers performs at Italian festivals and world dance programs across the country.

She's also director of the jazz program at New Albany Ballet Company, and she recently started Project Puglia—an initiative through the New Albany Children's Ballet Theatre to take young dance students to Italy. She's been named a Next Generation arts leader by the Academy for Leadership & Governance, a Columbus-based nonprofit run by Donn Vickers, the former head of the Thurber House.

Marrone and the Dance Cure will be part of the Columbus Italian Festival again this fall. Getting hundreds of people to participate in such group dances as the tarantella is one of the ways she's trying to create a "dancing community," she says. "For me, the motivation is to make work that engages people in dance and in culture. You can't put a price on feeling a sense of belonging to a community." ■

Maureen McGavin is an assistant editor and Cynthia Greenleaf, Joel Oliphint and Josie Rubio are editorial assistants for Columbus Monthly. Renée LaReau is a freelance writer.



Natalie Marrone