



Cycle of Life:

Choreographer Natalie Marrone searches for the cure of an Italian folk dance
By Jay Weitz

My wife tells this (possibly apocryphal) story about her paternal grandfather. On his transatlantic voyage from Eastern Europe to the New World around the turn of the last century, he literally danced his way out of steerage. In providing entertainment to the upper classes, he secured himself a better bunk and (family lore has it) never had to register when he arrived on Ellis Island.

Choreographer Natalie Marrone has mined her own family's immigrant experience and Southern Italian ethnic heritage as the focus of her work. The Ohio State University graduate founded her company, the Dance Cure, here in 1998.

That was the same year Columbus lost the Third Avenue Performance Space, affectionately known as TAPS. The climate for small local ensembles has never been the same, and Marrone is one of the brave few to stay in town after graduation to start an ensemble. "If you look up my birth date in an astrology book," she laughed, "the title on the day of my birth is 'the Hellraiser.'"

She'd been working with several dancers consistently for a while by 1998. "it seemed like a natural, organic growth from what had already been happening while I was a graduate student," she explained in a phone interview. "We were already in some ways a group, and to actually give it a title and start promoting it as a dance company then just seemed like a natural thing to do."

The name she chose, The Dance Cure, was intended to be multifaceted: helping to cure death of dance in Columbus and helping to show the way toward a more cooperative creative structure. Most important, though, it was a reference to the search that has become something of an obsession for Marrone.

Since 1997, she has made three trips to Italy in search for the origins of the tarantella, the folk dance that has its legendary root as a cure for tarantula bites. During her most recent trip in 2001, she learned about the tammoriata, "a couple's dance done with castanets at the mini Feast of the Virgin Mary," to be held in the small town of Lettere. Yet no one in area was able to give her any specific information about the dance.

Finally, after an exhausting day at nearby Pompeii, she returned to her room to rest. "All of a sudden, as the sun went down, I started to hear music playing in the square. I could hear people singing and calling, and I thought, Oh my God, something magical is about to happen."

Hurrying down to the town square, she found thousands of people dancing the tammoriata. One local musician ended up teaching her how, and she danced with the rest of the town throughout the night. "The tammoriata celebrates the cycle of life," Marrone explained. When the opposite-sex couples dance, it's a courtship; when same-sex couples dance, it's more of a duel to establish a pecking order, "Who's going to be the leader, who's going to be the follower."

Marrone is careful to point out that The Dance Cure does not try to recreate such authentic dances as the tammoriata or the pizzica tarantata, "an ecstatic dance done for the healing." Instead, the company performs modern interpretations "using the folk dances, steps from the folk dances, the ideas of the folk dances, the ideas of the relationships inside of the folk dance."

Her concert, titled Passages, will incorporate stylized versions of what she calls these "pagan" dances, filtered through Marrone's modern sensibilities. You can be sure that The Dance Cure will be good for what ails you.