

STEP IN TIME

A NEW VISION OF STEP DANCING WITH THE STEPCREW

By J.T. Ryder

The StepCrew brings to the stage a blending of traditional dance genres, displaying a unique comparative progression of how some seemingly divergent styles actually complement each other and share much of the same history. During a recent phone interview, StepCrew co-founder Jon Pilatzke brought the production's details and goals into focus in advance of the troupe's Saturday, November 7 appearance at the Victoria Theatre courtesy of Cityfolk.

"[There are] three styles in the show, the Ottawa Valley Step, the Irish Step and modern tap dancing," Pilatzke said. "There's a couple of numbers where we really kind of focus on showing each style back-to-back, in their traditional form, so you can really get a sense of, first of all, the differences of what the feet are doing; the rhythms. With tap, you've got the upper body as well, with its arm movements on more of a theatrical kind of plane. Then you have the Irish, which traditionally has very little movement in the upper body and then the Ottawa Valley...which is crazy all together."

The StepCrew members, while fairly new to the scene, have individually distinguished themselves as veteran stage performers by sharing the stage with such world class acts such as Bowfire, Seven Nations, Cherish the Ladies and the Chieftains. Pilatzke explained how he and his brother Nathan brought the Ottawa Valley Step to the world stage.

"We did some stuff here in Toronto. We were in a musical that featured our style of dance mixed with swing dancing. As far as being on an international level, the Chieftains were definitely the first project that exposed us to that arena...and Cara [Butler] as well. She was

with the Chieftains when we joined. She's also been involved with a dance production called Dancing on Dangerous Ground with her sister, Jean Butler (of Riverdance fame). Dan [Stacey] started out with a band called Seven Nations."

Along with the Pilatzke brothers, Butler and Stacey, the StepCrew also consists of Stephanie Cadman (Bowfire), Sarah Uddin and Joe Dwyer (both from Riverdance). Pilatzke discussed the international attention their regional style of dancing received due to touring with the Chieftains.

"It was quite something when Nathan and I started touring with the Chieftains," he said, "just to see how our little, remote style of dance could generate such a reaction from an international audience, like in Japan and all of these exotic places that you would never really think would be receptive to what we do. It's just one of those things that never really fails." Pilatzke said audiences should expect a high-octane, musically appealing show at the Victoria.

"The new show is such a high energy show. It's like 90 minutes of the most intense workout for us. We're so used to getting up for like three or four minutes, then sitting out for three or four numbers to catch our breath. This is like a marathon. The music, overall, tends to be Celtic in nature. We definitely go towards more of a jazzier sound on a couple of numbers when the tappers take the limelight. Three of us are Irish fiddlers, so we can definitely handle the Irish side for the Irish stepping."

The StepCrew's style seems to be a natural progression from what we here in America have been inundated with in previous years, namely Riverdance.

"It's funny to hear how people seem to like

the more expressive, free-form style that we have," Pilatzke said. "I think they were inundated with what people call Riverdancing...it's become the name of the style. Audiences are like, 'Oh! It's so great to see people moving their arms and having so much fun with smiles on their faces.'"

The StepCrew will perform Saturday, November 7 at 8 p.m. at the Victoria Theatre, 138 N. Main St. Tickets are priced at \$21-\$36. A pre-show whiskey tasting event will be held at 6 p.m. at the Dublin Pub (300 Wayne Avenue) as well as a post party with music by Mothergrove. To purchase tickets,



The StepCrew

call Cityfolk at (937) 496-3863 or visit online at www.cityfolk.tix.com.

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