

Body language

Briora Ballroom offers fun, fitness and finesse through dance

BY KEEGAN PROSSER

Ballroom dancing is a spectacle to watch. There's romance and glitter. Fancy shoes and elegant choreography. Flowing dresses gliding gracefully across the floor. And while the spectacle is often restricted to our television screens, a bit of the sparkle can now be found in Redmond - at Briora Ballroom.

Opened in January by professional dancer Jessica McMorrow, the 6,500-plus square foot facility - which features two dance floors, a lounge area and retail shop - is already being praised as one of the best studios in the country. Last month, McMorrow, along with friends, family and students, celebrated their public debut, with a special gala hosted by Jonathan Roberts of "Dancing With The Stars."

Raised in Kirkland, McMorrow got her first taste of dance at age seven, when her mom signed her up for a ballet class.

"She thought it was something nice for little girls to do," McMorrow says.

But it was much later, during a semester abroad in college, McMorrow discovered her true passion: ballroom dance.

"I was completely inspired," McMorrow says about watching her first professional competition. "I was like, this is so cool."

Now that 'nice activity' has become a full-time gig.

McMorrow says the idea to start her own studio came about in a discussion with her partner Slava Stefanov, whom she met while dancing in California in 2010. At the time, they were both working as independent teachers, conducting lessons in rented studios.

"It came to a point where I could no longer serve the needs of my clients," McMorrow says.

She felt opening a studio would give her the opportunity to build community among her dancers. And returning home to open the studio just made sense.

"My family is up here, and when I settled more permanently I wanted to be near them," McMorrow says.

With support from Stefanov and her father, an entrepreneur and business owner, McMorrow's dream of building a state-of-the-art studio started to take shape.

"I thought there was a place for a really beautiful, elegant ballroom [on the Eastside]," she says.

McMorrow says she's danced in studios where she was trying on a \$5,000 ball gown in a bathroom. That's not fitting of the beauty and elegance of ballroom dancing, she says. As such, she wanted to provide a space worthy of her customers time and money.

"Ballroom dance is a really beautiful thing," McMorrow says. "It's nice that the space can reflect that."

This idea is embodied at Briora Ballroom.

Upon entering the facility you'll encounter a cozy sitting room. To the right is a retail window, showcasing intricate, beaded ballroom gowns.

Toward the back of the massive space you'll spot a pair of sparkly crystal chandeliers, hanging elegantly over a brand new dance floor. This is where McMorrow and head choreographer Stefanov hold court.

While McMorrow says the core of their program is their ballroom classes (Standard and Latin), the studio has also introduced a series of fitness classes over the past few months. Classes include yoga, Nia (A one hour class incorporating structured and freeform movement to music incorporating the body, mind, emotions, and spirit), Feldenkrais (more therapeutic movement) and Eccentrics (toning fitness class). She is also interested in starting a kids' dance program in the fall.

In addition to scheduled classes, McMorrow also intends to begin hosting dance parties every Friday, where students can try the moves they've been learning in class. The space is also available to be rented for private events.

McMorrow says her favorite part of the day at Briora is when she puts on her practice clothes and dances around -



Slava Stefanov (choreographer and Senior Dance Instructor) and Jessica McMorrow (CEO and Ballroom Dance Instructor) at Briora Ballroom in Redmond. Photo by Katheryn Moran.

especially if it involves teaching others. And while Briora's current clientele consists mainly of advanced dancers, she and Stefanov are always bringing new people in.

"The great thing about us is that we're able to take people from the beginning - from the moment they first walk in, and don't know much about dancing, and maybe want to learn some social steps," McMorrow says. "And then if they do become interested in doing shows or competitions, we can take them to that level as well."

In this tradition, McMorrow's ultimate goal in opening Briora is to share the art of dance with as many people as she can.

"Dancing is something everybody can do," she says. "At its core, it's a social activity."

Plus, she adds, where else can you put on a rhinestone-studded gown (or suit) and dance around?

Briora Ballroom is located at 2260 152nd Ave NE, Suite 100 in Redmond.



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