

Pro/Am

BY BRIAN JONES

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONALS AND STUDENTS

Pro/Am is a mix of professional and amateur competition well used in a sporting context, but it has become very popular in the ballroom sector. In this article Brian Jones looks at the opportunities Pro/Am has opened up for dance professionals and dance students.

When you tell someone, you want to be a dancer, one of the most common questions you get asked is: “how are you going to make a living?” When you say that you’re going to learn to dance it’s: “what are you going to do with it?” Well the Pro/Am (Professional with Amateur) model helps answer both these questions, and for dancers whose genre is ballroom and Latin American, the *Dancesport* sector offers an opportunity for both amateur and professional.

Pro/Am began with franchise studios like Arthur Murray and Fred Astaire and has been a part of the American competitive dance scene for many years. This category was first introduced to New Zealand at the *Kiwi Classic* in 2011. Since then the New Zealand Pro/Am National Championships have been established, with events also being held as part of local competitions.

Students (the amateur) having weekly dance lessons are offered the opportunity to compete in a *Dancesport* competition either in individual dance or multi-dance events. At the competition, the amateur dancer is partnered by their teacher (the professional), or sometimes another professional dancer, and competes against other Pro/Am couples.

For the professional, this adds to their income stream, firstly from teaching and secondly from partnering the amateur at the competition. The amateur pays a fee to the professional for each single or multi-dance event. Some couples will dance up to 60 or more events if they choose to dance all styles – ballroom, Latin American, New Vogue, Smooth and Rhythm. Some just choose to dance a few.

For the amateur it provides an opportunity to test themselves against others on the competition floor. It also gives them a focus other than just dancing socially or training for medal tests. For some it is also the opportunity to get dressed up in glamorous outfits and experience their own *Dancing With The Stars*.

The advantage for the amateur, the majority of whom are adults, is that they are partnered by the teacher they are learning from or by another experienced professional who understands their abilities, rather than dancing with someone learning at the same level.

A great example of the type of student Pro/Am is designed for is Lois, a pupil of mine who first developed an interest in ballroom dancing in 1955 when she was 15 years old. When



BRIAN JONES & LOIS PRINGLE, KIWI CLASSIC 2017
PHOTO: POINTEVIEW PHOTOGRAPHY



BRIAN JONES AND LINDA WORTHINGTON, KIWI CLASSIC 2016
PHOTO: ROSEMARY CHUNG

learning at the Norma Wendon Studio in Auckland, students were encouraged to enter competitions. The older more experienced students were actively encouraged to partner the younger novice students to help give them confidence on the dance floor. Lois danced her last competition when she was 19 at the Peter Pan before heading off on her big OE.

During the years that followed, she travelled, met her husband, got married and returned to New Zealand with their young son. Still having a love for dance, Lois had hoped to return to it with her husband when they retired. Sadly, he died before that was possible. After some years, she began dancing socially but found it was not sufficiently satisfying for her. Eventually, after searching on the internet, she found a teacher and began having lessons again.

Lois came to me late in 2016 seeking to continue developing her dancing. When the new year began, I spoke with her about the *Kiwi Classic* which was being held at the beginning of April, explained about the Pro/Am events, how they worked, and offered her the opportunity to participate in the Masters events. It took her a couple of weeks to absorb the idea before returning to say she would love to do it if I was prepared to dance with her.

For Lois, this was a dream come true. It was an opportunity that provided focus for her dance lessons and

also the excitement of preparing for an event – having a dress made, shoes bought and being out on the dance floor in the ballroom. After a break of 58 years she was back out on the competition floor!

In addition to dancing in the Pro/Am there was also the support and encouragement she got from friends. At the competition, she met previous teachers and acquaintances as well as complete strangers who gave her encouragement and support. It was a memorable day for her. For myself, while this is how I make my living, I gained a great deal of satisfaction from giving someone like Lois the opportunity to achieve a goal that fulfils one of her dreams.

There are many people out in the community, especially women, who have previously danced or would like to learn to dance and challenge themselves on the competition floor with all its glamour. Without a partner – and good men who are prepared to dance can be hard to find – this isn't possible. These are the people who Pro/Am is aimed at. The range of people attracted to these events is broad – men, women, adults mostly, but also youth.

The reality for anyone wanting to be a dance teacher is that there is no arts or sports funding to help support them. The Pro/Am model has served sport well and with the opportunity it provides for professional dancers to make a living while giving their students the opportunity to achieve, we will no doubt see further growth in this area. ■

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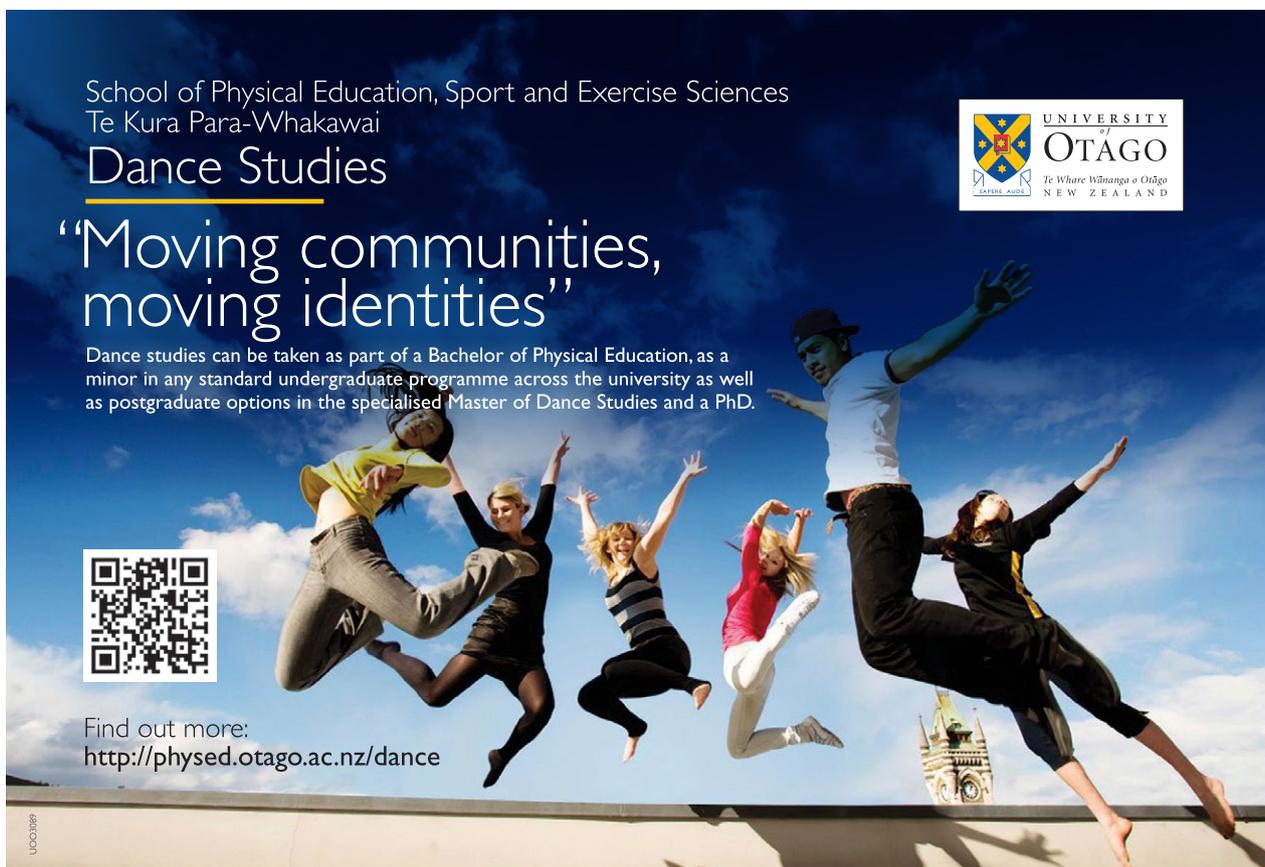
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