

Claymore Dancers ? The Academy of Highland Dance



Written By **CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD**

Picture this: a perfect summer's day and the pipes are playing, floating their high pitched and low rumble of the Scottish bag pipes upon the air. Originally, created to terrify the enemy as the troops came marching on, it is sometimes easy to imagine, as a multitude of them walk the Main Field. United, it is the sound of a coming storm, but which, for the Scots, is the sound of home.

Welcome to a Scottish Festive, a Scottish Highland Games.

On the main stage, in the sunshine, young women to the youngest little girl take their turns at performing the Highland Dances, with traditions that go back in history and tradition, as far as the pipes themselves. Indeed, one of those pipes may be providing the music, and the busy beat to which the girls are dancing.

Look how they twirl, how fast their feet, how they kick and jump! Agility, technique, discipline ? grace are all part of the whole beautiful production, with costumes that tell stories as much as the dances do.

Some of the dancing is competitive; some of it is display. All of it only comes with dedication and passion for it, like all the arts, quite engrossing and wonderful. The dancers give a lot of their time over the summer months to attend and dance at the Games, garnering their medals and cups as they thrill the judges with their skill and talent.

Certainly this is the case for the dance students at the Claymore Dancers - Academy of Highland Dance, founded and owned by Tara Revie Breeze, BATD Fellow ? Highland, BATD Member ? National, BFA in Dance (Honours), B Ed, CI (Conditioning and Imagery for Dance) Trainer.

Ms Breeze tells her story: ?I have been dancing since I was six years old and loved dancing all my life.?

She went on to earn her many degrees and certifications, while also taking ballet, contemporary, jazz and tap.

?I danced with the Scottish Dance Company of Canada for ten years,? she said, adding, ?We performed with some of the top Celtic musicians, including Leahy and Natalie MacMaster.?

Dancing for audiences at the 2003 Edinburgh Military Tattoo and working in the PBS special, A time to Remember, were really highlights for her in her life, as well.

?I was first certified to teach about 20 years ago. I taught at studios in the GTA for about ten years and then thought I would have a go at running my own studio, now for ten years. It is seven years since we came to Caledon, to where I moved my studio.?

Now that it is June, the whirl of the Scottish Games has begun already, with the Georgetown Highland Games, opening this weekend, on Saturday.

The Claymore Dancers are ready: ?Some of our girls are competing this weekend at Georgetown,? Ms Breeze told the Citizen. ?We go to Fergus [Scottish Festival and Highland Games, in August] as well as others but we're not going to Maxville [the Glengarry Highland Games] this year because I'm taking some of the dancers to Gettysburg in the States.?

Between her full time job as a high school teacher in Toronto, working currently in the Guidance Department, and teaching in her studio in Caledon, Ms Breeze has no time for dancing as performer herself, although, as she pointed out, ?Teaching requires me to dance, to illustrate the moves.?

Naturally, the question followed if her own daughter dances. It was an interesting reply: Said Ms Breeze, ?I only wanted her to come when she wanted to. So, I would ask her, when she very young, if she would like to come to dance and she said no. I left it but I asked her every time. When she was four, she told me, ?I'm going to come to dance class.' And, then, she never stopped. It had to be her own decision. She is seven years old now.?

Almost all her students ?are coming from Caledon. Their background ? some of them have Scottish roots; some just see us out in the community. All the kids like the culture. We make sure the kids learn about the cultural background of the dancing.?

She talked about the many virtues of dance: ?It's great exercise. It develops strength, agility, technique, grace ? it's an art form. The costumes are a big part of it and the parents really love them. They are quite conservative, compared other dance styles. There are a lot of traditions and stories that go with the costumes, old histories.

?They are really kilts that the dancers wear, of course [for the sword dance and others]. Nowadays, the colours are brighter. Traditionally, they were more muted colours. The students can't learn the dance without learning the traditions, understanding where they come from.?

At some time, everyone visits to a Highland Games. ?They all go at one point or another.?

The really important part of the whole are the friendships that are developed between the dancers, friendships that last.

?The ambitions for the girls to compete, stay in shape, the connection goes on in the friendships made ? they really last a life time.?

The connections: ?One young girl's mother used to dance ? it becomes generational. When we do our community shows, the older girls, who might not dance any more, come back to help with the costumes or with back stage.?

By the bye, it is also a lot of fun.

For Ms Breeze, her ambition is to keep doing this: ?I wanted to create a studio that I would want my own child to attend: 1 - to have a strong technique and 2 - to provide an outlet for performance. When I did have a child, this is a studio where she can be happy.?

She said, ?I just want to keep doing it as long as I can.?

For all the details and information, go to the website at claymoredancers.weebly.com