



PACIFIC BALLROOM DANCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pacific Ballroom Dance, creative solutions to COVID-19

Auburn, WA - Pacific Ballroom Dance's studio location has gone dark. Like so many non-profits and small businesses, COVID-19 has meant an overnight transformation from a busy, bustling hub of social life and community, to a place of disquieting stillness. The turnaround was especially dramatic set against the backdrop of the US National Amateur Dancesport Championship in Provo, Utah where 112 members of PBD formation ballroom dance teams had traveled to compete. "When we left Auburn on Tuesday, (March 10th) we were worried about the virus, but we focused on taking care of our dancers, keeping them healthy, and making the final preparations for the competition pieces we had worked on for months," said preteen coach Beth Dolan. "When we came home three days later, life seemed unrecognizable. Schools were canceled, social gatherings were banned. When we said goodbye at the airport to our



This Youth Latin Formation medley won second place at Nationals. Unable to compete in the final rounds of their division, the high school dancers were rated and placed based on the scores of the preliminary round.



The Preteen Latin Formation Medley won first place at Nationals on March 12th, the last day that groups larger than 250 were allowed to gather in both Washington, and Utah, where the competition was held.

kids and our staff, we didn't know when we would see each other again. There were a lot of tears."

The competition was canceled in the middle of the second day of events and by 2am that night, after a six hour wait time with Delta's customer service, Executive Director Heather Longhurst had booked flights home for everyone the next day. "Although incredibly sad and disappointing to come home so

quickly, it was an easy choice to make," she said. "We needed to get those kids home to their families."

PBD returned victorious from Utah having achieved top placements in the formation ballroom dance events that were held, including a first place in Preteen Latin, a second place in Youth Latin, and a second place in Junior Ballroom. The young dancers had mixed emotions, learning their team placements within a few hours of the announcement that they be coming home early. "We were able to bond as a team, laugh together, bring that energy into our dancing and we also shared tears together," said junior dancer Brynn Bennion, "but that is what brought us closer together."



Karen Dawe and her partner Matt learn from Alex Olivares on a live Zoom meeting.

Since coming home, and after a time of grief and shock, Pacific Ballroom Dance's program leaders have adapted to a new reality. All teams and classes for kids and adults are now being held online. Adult instructor Alex Olivares (pictured left) taught his first online class on Wednesday. He demonstrated cha-cha steps from his carpeted living room to adults across the community. "I'm excited to be able to help our students from the comfort of their own homes," said Alex. "Any physical movement that can be done under these circumstances is a great way to deal with stress and uncertainty during these trying times."

Even the youngest dancers, the three-year-old Shooting Stars, hold class with their teacher Raney Welch. Raney is creating video lessons each week for her dancers to follow which include dance steps and value-based lessons. "Excellence is doing what I can with what I have, where I am, as I am," Raney taught her students this week, including the youngest girl named Kinley Anderson who sat and stretched along with her teacher, wearing her dance shoes and leggings at home. "I liked seeing Miss Raney on TV," said Kinley, "and doing my noodles and straws at home!" "Noodles" means energetic wiggle dances and "straws" means standing up straight and very still.



Four year old Kinley Anderson learned from home during the COVID-19 "shelter-in-place."

One of the great difficulties for arts organizations is the cancellation of spring performances. Artistic Director Katie Mecham is making plans for a groundbreaking ballroom dance concert this spring held virtually. "Art is the ultimate vehicle of expression and together we can create something meaningful, beautiful and relevant," said Katie. She believes that this moment in time in which communities unite to fight the spread of COVID-19 provides a unique opportunity for impacting audiences and students in new, powerful ways. "We have an opportunity to help our students process this experience in the midst of great uncertainty," said Artistic Director Katie Mecham. "Our ability as a staff to show grit and determination can provide an

example for the students in their lives. We can teach them how to work through their sadness, fear, and isolation and transform it into the seeds of artistic expression. “

The “stay at home” directive and “social distancing” will mean a difficult time ahead for ballroom dance, but PBD’s board of directors is committed to keeping staff employed and programs running, despite the closed doors of the studio. Communications and Development Specialist Anne Eugenio said, “Pacific Ballroom Dance will have many challenges in the months to come and will need support at the city, state, and national level to ensure a healthy arts organization is ready to receive the community when the dangers of COVID-19 have receded.” She added, “Our community will be there for us in many forms. We aren’t alone. We don’t know what is going to happen as each week passes, but we will pursue every avenue of support we can find. From grants and low-interest government loans, to donations from foundations and online fundraisers, we will make sure we can sustain our studio, even when the doors are shut.”

Individuals can also help. “The best thing our community can do is stay enrolled in our classes while we ‘shelter-in-place,’ said Heather. “We will continue to connect with our community through every creative means possible. We are all in this together and we will get through it together.”

Pacific Ballroom Dance (PBD) began in 1994 as a small, local youth club with a goal to provide young teens with the opportunity to build respectful social skills, self-esteem, fitness and teamwork. In 2003, PBD became a 501©3 non-profit organization with a mission to build character in youth by providing a positive ballroom dance experience. Today, PBD is a thriving youth dance education studio based in Auburn, Washington, serving more than 1000 students annually from age 10-18 from throughout the Puget Sound area.

MISSION Pacific Ballroom Dance builds character in youth by providing a positive ballroom dance experience.

For an online copy of this press release visit: <http://pacificballroom.org/media/> For more information contact Anne Eugenio at anne@pacificballroom.org