

HUMAN TO HUMAN: GLASS HOUSE BALL BREAKS THE MOLD

BY CHRISTY SANDMAIER



In the September 2016 issue of *Inside Dance* we introduced you to Larisa and Ryan Eronemo. Having just opened Glass House Dance in Sammamish, Washington, they were embarking on an incredible journey as studio owners. Never wavering from their vision "to have a place where everyone feels included, where everyone's voice is valid, and everyone's path is valid," they have remained true to their goal of inclusion - of transparency, and of never conforming to a mold or expectation of what dance *should* be. Today, not only have they surpassed all of the goals they set at the time, they're creating community both in and out of the studio. We asked them about Glass House Ball - their twist on the recital experience - and where their dreams will take them next.

The video compilation of the Glass House Ball 3 looked incredible! Tell us about the preparation leading up to the day and the feeling as the event took place. What were you most proud of?

The preparation for the event is immense to say the least. We start the day after the event ends for next year! It gets extremely intense with organization, planning and coordination in January and the amount of time it takes to put together increases exponentially each month. The biggest thing we worry about is contingency plans. The event is outside

and open to the general public. These variables can mix for some interesting outcomes that have to be accounted for! Is it going to rain, or will it be hot? Will we have a huge influx of the general public attend? There is certainly never a dull moment! Beyond that, the production of the event has so many huge components. We essentially create a theater outside and combine it with an outdoor festival, and cater it, so it is really like planning three events all at the same time, in seamless coordination and conjunction. We are most proud of breaking the mold, by creating our own - redefining it, year-after-year to create something that is ever changing and evolving and would be quite impossible to duplicate or copy.

How many people attended the event? What was the overall feedback you received?

This year's Glass House Ball had an approximate attendance of 4,000 throughout the course of the day. Roughly 1,800 were friends and family members of our performing dancers. The other people



in attendance were general admissions from the community. The feedback we received has been incredibly positive. We hear regularly the Glass House Ball is the absolute most enjoyable recital experience families have ever had. People really seem to respond well that they have the genuine opportunity to engage and connect with one another at the event, human to human. It's centered around dance but not confined to dance. It's accessible and relatable, on multiple levels.

What is the goal for each Glass House Ball? Is it overarching, or do you set new goals each year?

The overarching goal for the Glass House Ball initially, was just proof of concept. We had this quirky idea about how we could do something unique that addressed some of the drudgery of a traditional dance recital. People initially thought we were insane. They truly just couldn't even envision what we were planning and made claims that it just couldn't be done, because it had never been done!! Now that the concept is proven and has sort of taken on a life of its own, we are settling into the same process-focused approach we use for everything. *How do we get better? What didn't work as well as we hoped?...* One of the really amazing things, is after enough changes and adjustments you end up in a place you could have never envisioned, much like the evolution choreographic work can undergo. It's really a fun process to be involved with because in a traditional theater setting, you are confined by the limitations of the theater's capacity, building layout, and equipment. But for an event like this, there is always a blank canvas. When you create everything out of thin air, there is nothing that can't be changed, adjusted, added or taken away.

To what do you attribute your overall success? Your program is literally growing by leaps and bounds...

Our programs are literally growing by leaps and bounds. After three completed seasons and now the start of our fourth, we are already where we could have only hoped to be by the end of our careers. We absolutely attribute this success to the community. We do things a little bit different in a lot of ways and drastically different in all the rest. Our community of dancers, parents, teachers, surrounding businesses and city officials have all been amazingly supportive of every crazy idea we have. They have trusted us. This has helped us create something new, and special, not just in our events, but with our weekly classes, business operation in general and with



our performance and competitive teams. Sometimes our core values at Glass House can seem counterintuitive to what is the "norm" in this industry. It is possible to be accepting, loving, and inclusive of everyone no matter where they are at in their journey as a dancer, while still seeing immense growth and creating excellence in a dancer's craft.

Talk about balance - family life, studio, events - how do you keep it all in perspective and enjoyable?

This one is hard. Any studio owner knows that this seems like an impossible task. We have two small children ourselves, ages 4 and 1 and a half. We are married and full fledged business partners. It is a constant challenge to balance, separate it and not let the studio "define" our entire existence. Conscious choice to "work" or "not work" has helped a lot. We've tried hard to leverage technology, as to allow us to work and be present or available for the business, even when we are not physically there. However, I think the biggest thing we have learned is that owners tend to be a bottleneck to the growth of their own business. If you are consistently working IN your business, you never have time to work ON your business and certainly no time for family life. This comes down to finding the right staff then placing them with responsibility best suited for the team at large. The hardest part is releasing the control to allow them to do

their job. I think there is one more piece to this and it's that you must enjoy the process. Sometimes that means taking time away. Sometimes leaning in. It's all about streamlining and simplifying your processes, having the correct personnel in place and giving them the chance to do better than you might even have been able to do yourself.

Is there a new dream for Glass House? Where would you like to be in 5 to 10 years?

We always have something crazy in the works, we're day dreamers at heart with a little bit of adrenaline junkies in our soul. For now, all I can say is our journey in redefining the dance studio experience has only just begun! We always tell our competitive dancers, "if you compete against others you get bitter, if you compete against yourself you get better." We are always working at being better this year then we were the last, and that goes for every facet of the dance studio business, at large. We always say, "the work is never done, you just choose to stop working on it."