
COVID-19 WILL NOT KEEP US APART: RECONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY

Chris Feist was well acquainted with the torpor of doomscrolling until he came across a post that took him back to a time of dancing the nights away while spinning his favourite latin tunes.

His everyday reality took an unexpected turn as the COVID-19 pandemic hit. A glimmer of his past life gave Feist, DJ and dancer, a happy memory to remember. Relaxing on his couch, scrolling through dozens of mundane posts, one video in particular caught his eye. “Seeing familiar faces and watching them so happy to dance again is what did it for me” said Feist. As the couple was moving to the beat and showcasing their moves to a fiery latin rhythm, Feist’s eyes lit up and toes started tapping for the first time in nearly half a year.

The Local Dancers’ Spotlight series not only put a grin on his face but on the faces of Ottawa’s dance community. Studios and dancers city-wide are stepping up to tell their story and strut their stuff with fancy moves across the studio dance floor. The man behind the madness, Rahim Noudehaki, determined to reignite the dance community and give dancers a stage to tell their story.



Noudehaki interviews
Ottawa dancer and teacher
Julie-Anne Codaire late
November, one month after
launching the Local
Dancers’ Spotlight
initiative.

Founder of the Ottawa-Gatineau International Salsa Festival, Rahim was inspired by the tremendous support received following the annual dance extravaganza early November. Over 1,700 viewers tuned in and dozens showed their support during and after the live show. Noudehaki was motivated by his successes and wanted to continue to make connections with as many dancers in the community as he possibly could, so he launched the Local Dancers’ Spotlight series.

The Local Dancers’ Spotlight project perfectly timed, as the arctic air moves in and the winter blues take over. This year, the battle greater with COVID-19 embracing the landscape and inflicting feelings of isolation, withdrawal and fear. The mental anguish and emotional struggle tormenting both young

and old. It is community members like Noudehaki that make all the difference. One person paving the way for a greater connection and understanding between community members, sets the stage for others to follow. A light at the end of the tunnel, Noudehaki has lead by example and sends the message that if we unite and work together as one, even remotely, we can overcome anything. “We want to keep the experience of the local dance community alive and assure dancers that they are not forgotten” said Rahim. An advocate for inclusion and self-expression, he points out that the Local Dancers’ Spotlight initiative is not only meant for making those connections and friendships desired in our community but reminds us that local dance businesses, too, are struggling and need our help.

Noudehaki, in his feat to reignite the dance community is disappointed with mainstream media and its neglect of dance and dance studios in Ottawa. News crews were hitting the streets to report on business owners from hair salons, restaurants to fitness studios during COVID times; many businesses approached with the exception of dance studios. Sipping on a hot cup of chamomile tea, watching the late night news, Rahim was shocked to see that not even one major news outlet had reached out to local dance studios or individual members of the dance community. “We’re here, we’re still alive, don’t forget about us” said Noudehaki.

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- RAHIM NOUDEHAKI

As a fellow dancer, event founder and dance community representative Noudehaki understands the hardships dancers are grappling with. They once lived a life of flashy costumes, bright lights and elaborate stages. Their time was spent with like-minded individuals sharing the same interests and appreciation of dance. Their reality vibrant, colourful and full of lustre; all to vanish into thin air.

Noudehaki was excited to finally get some attention on the dance front with an online petition launched to fight for the re-opening of dance schools. The buzz in mid-October got some media attention only to dissipate in no time. Noudehaki decided it was time to get the ball rolling



Rahim Noudehaki interviewing owner Slavik Tudorovsky and teacher Stephanie Tudorovsky from SlavaTalent Ballroom Dance Studio. They will be featured in a Local Dancer Spotlight episode in late December 2020.

and bring back a flicker of hope to dancers. He got his thinking cap on and it wasn't long before a bright idea popped into his head. Giving studios and dancers a platform was his goal. "The whole idea was mainly for communities to hear about the challenges dancers go through personally and in their dance career" said Rahim.

The Local Dancers' Spotlight feature spread like wildfire across social media platforms and "many left positive comments on our posts and were really impressed by our efforts" said Noudehaki. While roadblocks on the path to success are expected, this project was no exception. Most featured were "positive and very happy to see themselves in a new light that they weren't in before and this gave them a boost" said Mary Werre, the project editor. According to Werre, knowing the type of narrative to follow and achieving the right balance for each artist requires research and time. The team has gone above and beyond the call of duty to create professional, top-of-the-line content at no cost. Yet, with the many successes, the project did encounter some setbacks with certain studio owners consumed with their branding and feature details imposing delays and absorbent hours of extra work for the volunteers.

This video series has put a smile on the faces of many, creating an atmosphere of camaraderie, appreciation and hope. It has been rewarding to Noudehaki and his crew as well as to the dancers from Ottawa and surrounding areas. Feist hopes to see a follow-up project that brings to life the stories of the members of the dance community not in the spotlight. The organizing teams, DJs, videographers, editors who get the show on the road and make dancer's dreams a reality. Noudehaki sees the spotlight series as just the beginning and is working on other inspirational initiatives for the New Year.