



Line dancer

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At home with
Maggie G

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The one and only Maggie G



If someone asked Line dancers the world over to pick one name that defines the passion, the joy and the fun of Line dance, Maggie Gallagher would surely be the name they'd choose. No one has done more, given more than Maggie over the years to this community. Linedancer magazine is proud to feature an exclusive interview with this extraordinary Lady of Line dance.



Linedancer: First of all Maggie thank you for accepting this interview... we know how busy you are..

MG: Not at all, it's a pleasure, thank you so much for asking me to do this...

LD: OK let's start from the beginning... How did dance start for you?

MG: Oh! I was very young. I started Irish dancing at the age of five and did competition in Irish dance until I was 16. It was my sister Annette who introduced me to Line dance in Ireland. I was already teaching Irish and I am also a qualified teacher in Modern, Tap and Jazz. As soon as I saw it, I loved Line dancing straight away and started teaching it in January 1995. I had always choreographed for Tap and Irish shows so Line dance was a natural link for me.

LD: You were noticed fairly quickly...

MG: I was so lucky. I hit big with Dancing Violins. It was such a good feeling,

especially as I hadn't been teaching long and that's when Barbara Blake took me on and organised all my bookings.

LD: You are known throughout the world, not just as a choreographer but a great teacher... How does it work on both fronts?

MG: Choreographing to a broad band of music for all levels is very important, I like to cater for everyone so that all levels can enjoy dance. When I'm out on the road I'm happy to teach whatever is asked for because I enjoy seeing everyone socialising as well as dancing. I still think that Line dance's great bonus is the sense of friendship people get from it and its social scene. I try to keep dancers interested, that's my main goal. I know some people will say you can try to please everyone and end up pleasing no one, but I have been lucky so far.

LD: Is it really down to luck? Surely not...

MG (laughs): Look, as for any hobby that has dance at its heart, a new trend will always come in. That, as far as I am concerned is a good thing, it gives what you do more spice and keeps it interesting. I just try to keep with what is happening and what folks like.

LD: So change is the key?

MG: Yes and no. I think it is great to move on but it is vital to keep to our roots and not ditch the well known dances altogether. Some of those choreographies

are our foundations and our back catalogue is full of classics. It is important to remember them and introduce them to new generations of dancers.

LD: And as the debate of Pop or Country continues, is it that relevant today?

MG: No, not really. It started with Country and we are proud of this but many years on it has moved on to all styles such as NC2 Step, Waltz, Latin & Irish. I believe that this wide choice is what keeps Line dancing fresh and interesting and lets face it we are all different and enjoy different types of music hence, Line dancing caters for all.

LD: So there is room for everyone?

MG: Absolutely. Look, a good song is a good song. To me if it is beautiful, moves you and makes you want to dance then go ahead. Dance is about expressing yourself without words, and great music is key.

LD: Anyone who knows you can never fail but to be amazed at your level of energy, your love of life and your incredibly hectic schedule... how do you do it Maggie?

MG: Not on my own for sure (laughs). My husband John is extremely supportive and I know that when I am working away on a Saturday it is always a boy's fun day. My family in Ireland play a very big part in my life, my Mum, Dad and sister Annette help me immensely. They come to the UK a lot and we go to Ireland as much as we can, which the boys love as my husband's family are there too. Without this support, I would not be able to do what I do and being a Mum at home is my most important role. My boys remain my biggest achievement.

LD: Home is Coventry, am I right?

MG: Yep, has been for over 40 years. We are very happy here, the boys have settled well in schools and we live in a great community with really good friends.

LD: Are the boys interested in Line dance?

MG: Yes and no! Sean is seven and shows interest in Irish dancing and had a go at Line dancing. Gerard is five and at this time has no inclination towards dance whatsoever though, he and Sean love all sports, especially swimming. Pdraig is just three so there may be some hope, who knows?



LD: Another huge challenge for you must be choreographing and finding music?

MG: I am not on my own with this problem. Many choreographers will tell you that finding good songs is almost a life long search. But people are very kind and often email me with great tunes. I must also say that Dave Blake, Jane Kenrick, George Crutchlow and Tim Ruzgar in particular have been very supportive over the years.

LD: If you had to choose between teaching and choreographing which would win?

MG: Oh yikes! This is the hardest question ever! I must admit that I love teaching, I have taught all different types of dance for most of my life. Choreographing whether it's for an Irish show or Line dance is always immense pressure as it has to be right but when it's done - I love it. I love the stage and love to make people laugh but I can be nervous especially if we are performing a big Irish dance show.

LD: So because you are invited to so many events, you must feel the pressure when asked to come up with new dances all the time?

MG: Absolutely, yes, I do. This, for me, is by far the most stressful element in my professional life. And no matter how many years I have been a choreographer, I still cannot tell how a new dance will go down.

Some of the dances I have written that I do love have not done so well and others that I have been very unsure of, have. It makes it all very interesting.

LD: Things have changed over the years in the Line dance world, what would you say is still lacking?

MG: Without a doubt, media portrayal is a big problem for us all. People who do not Line dance still believe that we slap our thighs and bottoms shouting yeeha. I would really like to see us focus on getting this changed.

I embrace how Line dance has moved on and am immensely proud of this, especially in the world competitions, the level and standard is fantastic now and yet, we are still being shown as being the most basic of dancers. It really is unfair and stops new people joining.

LD: Several hundreds of dances later,

what is the process of writing like? How long for example do you take to choreograph a dance on average?

MG: Hard to tell really. The Flute took me just an hour, I loved the beat and it flowed straight away. One of my latest, Stop Me Now, took about 15 minutes, I actually choreographed this on the way back from school, rang Keeley and said just tags and restarts to sort. But at other times, it can be days. Depends on the muse!

LD: Who do you look up to Maggie? Who has it all as far as Line dance is concerned?

MG: Gosh, I think of three people who mean everything to me in this community. I love Helen O'Malley for her friendship, encouragement and inspiring me to choreograph all those years ago, she saw something in me and built my courage up. She is such a great lady.

And where would I have been without Jo Thompson and Scott Blevins for encouraging me to tour and build my confidence at a time where things were so new. They are fantastic dancers and friends.

As for Roy Verdonk, he is an amazing person. Roy is so talented from teaching to training for competition and, sheer entertainment on the dance floor. For me he has always been the full package.

LD: You are known throughout the world for your boundless energy and fun but many dancers may not know that you were awarded a Good Citizen award by the Mayor of Coventry for your charity fundraising in 2010, tell us a little more...?

MG: Yes, well, it was a lovely recognition but I did not do it on my own. My Line dance club and Celtica Dance Academy have raised over £85,000 in 15 years and we are one of Coventry's biggest fundraisers. So this award recognised us all as good citizens as far as I am concerned.

LD: You keep amazing us all, Maggie, you really do. Is there one last thing you would like to say?

MG: Yes, there is something actually. I know people from all over the world who see me often, who I teach and to them it looks as if I do all that on my own. Well that is not so. I couldn't... and that's a fact. The truth is that I have to thank so many people for allowing me to do what I do.

My wonderful family, my Line dance club and Celtica Irish dancers in Coventry



are the best, without their support and keeping me grounded for the last 19 years, there would be no Maggie Gallagher.

And there would be no Maggie either if it was not for my fantastic network of friends who help and support me daily, Keeley Middleditch, Big Dave and Pauline Baycroft, Gwen Worrall, Mike and Sally Brown, Audrey Tinley and Catherine Gow to name a few.

Over the years there have been many others. Every award I have been lucky to receive, every hit on the dance floor, every achievement I may have managed is in large part due to them as well as my many fans and instructors who have supported me so well over the years.

And if Line dance ever meant anything to me, it would always be through the eyes, ears and hearts of my friends, family and supporters. I know it may sound a cliché but I really do LOVE them all.

