



LOVING DANCE

The couple behind White Bird say they wouldn't want to run the company without the other; their relationship is at the core.



Walter Jaffe and Paul King and their son, Barney Whitebird.

It takes a lot of passion and commitment to sustain a thirty-year romance. Walter Jaffe and Paul King spotted one another in an Upper West Side bar in New York City, and one thing led to another. Now, three decades later (and across the continent) they still have commitment and passion to spare.

They remained in NYC for their first fourteen years together. Paul, a graduate of Cordon Bleu Culinary School, worked as a chef, and Walter used his degree in German Literature in his career in publishing. They expressed their love of the arts by attending every event they could.

In 1996 they were searching for a change of life and location. Santa Rosa, CA, was the apparent winner out of the places they'd visited. Then two people said, "you should really check out Portland, OR." They did, and the timing was fortuitous. They arrived at the same time as the floodwaters of 1996.

The huge natural disaster didn't turn them off. In fact, it was "images of the mayor going down to the riverfront to help other citizens with the sandbags" that left an indelible and endearing image. This is a city that pulled together.

In New York, Walter had served on the board of the legendary Paul Taylor Dancers. Just as they settled in to their new home a friend from the Paul Taylor organization called. Would they like to join him at a conference of dance companies (being held in Portland)?

At the conference they were introduced to many agents and dance companies from across the country. Walter remembers, "They all said, 'nobody is presenting us in Portland.'" Walter continues, "We learned that Portland had a well developed dance audience through PSU's company, an impresario that brought in ballet, and a company that presented mod-

ern companies that were touring." Paul interjects, "But all of those programs had disappeared at that time, and there was a developed audience but no shows."

They'd come to Portland with the idea of a catering or chocolate business. But this vacancy within the dance world was thrilling. Dance is something that they'd both loved. The idea and opportunity became White Bird Dance (the name White Bird is derived from their "twenty-four year-old, feather-covered son, Barney Whitebird").

All of their vacations now revolve around White Bird. Their travels take them off to Germany for a dance festival, then off to Taiwan, Korea, South Africa, and Brazil. Often they travel at the invitation of the government or the festival (White Bird, Paul, and Walter are considered the pipeline to the western states).

They consider themselves a team. A team that, charmingly, finishes one another's sentences. Walter: "Our temperaments compliment each other..." Paul: "and we bring different skills sets to whatever project we're focusing on." Walter: "But we share a common vision. When we're deciding on programming, for instance, if one of us doesn't agree — we don't do it." Paul: "For budget reasons, we don't often travel together, and see work together. So we have complete faith in the other's decision."

Living here is the most important part of their mission. "Anyone could just bring dance companies in and present them. We want to connect the dancers to the community. To that end the companies must agree to do an outreach while in Portland. For thirteen years they've done an outreach program with Portland Public Schools."

Both men agree, if the other weren't involved, they wouldn't want to do White Bird alone. They cite their relationship as the core that makes White Bird workable. "Dance is something that we both love," notes Walter. "It is our life's work." §

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UPCOMING

Hubbard Street
Dance Chicago
February 13th

Black Grace
February 19th

Contemporary Ballet
of Algiers/
Abou Lagraa
March 21st – 23rd

Paul Taylor Dance
Company
April 4th – 6th

Ballet BC
May 8th

whitebird.org