



Playful, flirtatious
Stefan Deuber and
Valérie Bissig swing
from place to place.



Text: Sarah Altenaichinger

JUST DANCE!

On stages, dance floors and in the streets –
the choices to dance in Zurich are endless.

The thick blanket of clouds suddenly parts like a curtain, revealing the generously proportioned stage that lies beneath: the city of Zurich. The Limmat river has an elegant self-assurance as it shimmies through the city center on its way. The city is an intricate patchwork of winding streets, elaborate cathedrals and modern high-rise buildings. It's a fitting stage for German-speaking Switzerland's dance capital, with its wealth of professional training academies and independent educational institutions.

The wealth of dance schools, styles, and events may not always be apparent to the unaware observer. On one weekend in spring, however, the city showcases the full, thrilling variety of the dance scene as it marks International Dance Day: at the "Zürich Tanz" festival in May, the train station concourse is converted into a stage. Rather than rushing to catch their next train, commuters become spectators, and passers-by become dancers. Shows are staged all over the city and visitors can dance their way through the center on tours or take a dance crash course. The festival boasts four dancers who particularly excel at their chosen art. They anticipate trends, attend all the festivals, perform in renowned venues and pass on their passion to others. In short, dance has become their life. And yet their individual styles – urban dance, swing and contemporary dance – couldn't be more different.

The cool one

For Debbie Zehnder, a native of Zurich, there's nothing better than urban dance. The term "urban" refers to dance styles, or social dances, that are influenced by moves from everyday culture and lifestyle. Debbie discovered Jamaican Dancehall early on, when it was barely known in Switzerland.

Debbie took long and intensive research trips before passing on her technique at home. As she leads a lesson at the Offdance school in Zurich Wiedikon, her every move reveals just how much she loves her job. With her bouncing blond hair and

vibrant t-shirt she demonstrates the steps with incredibly nimble feet. Her hands and feet seem to be telling a story, her hips gyrate sinuously, and movements ripple like waves along her upper body. Body language really does speak louder than words.

Besides working as an instructor, dancer, and lecturer at Zurich's Advanced College of Contemporary and Urban Dance, Debbie is also a freelance dancer with her own dance company "Dem-A!-Dis", which performs at events, shows and battles. She is particularly proud of her numerous victories and sparkling collaborations, at home and abroad. Dancehall is now a worldwide phenomenon, and Debbie has fulfilled her goal of developing a local scene with the help of various collaborators.

The lively one

Swing dance is another deserving revival that blossomed in the 1980s. It's a highly flirtatious style which relies heavily on interaction, improvisation and a big dose of joie de vivre. It seems fitting that dance partners Stefan Deuber and Valérie Bissig met at a "social dance" party, where the motto was "everybody has to dance with everybody." Today, they're an experienced team. Their repertoire includes the energetic Lindy Hop dance style, as well as the recently added Collegiate Shag, with its acrobatic moves and idiosyncratic rhythm.

Their absolute favorite, however, is the fast-moving, elegant Balboa dance in which the dancers' feet seem to hover above the ground. This economy of movement developed in response to crowded ballrooms, where space was limited. Stefan has been offering lively classes at his "Downtownswing" dance school for four years now. Dance students can be seen swirling to music in the Yellow Room of the community center. Stefan and Valérie are a cheerful team as they demonstrate the moves, motivate their students and playfully explain the dos and don'ts of the dance steps. But they are quick to emphasize that the priority is to have fun! The two dancers carry this motto with them at all times as they travel to countless international swing festivals and take part in swing-themed workshops, with the aim of improving their skills and making new friends.

The experimental one

Contemporary dancer Romain Guion considers himself a world citizen. After training at the Paris Conservatory, the Frenchman danced in Belgium, Ireland, Wales, Spain, South Korea, Denmark and Germany, and toured numerous countries before eventually dancing his way to Zurich – his new home. The city is a home base with opportunities for dance performance projects, which he tackles with gusto.

Romain defines his dance style as physical theater. This means dancers using their bodies to convey emotions and striving for a state of comfortable vulnerability. Their movements are angular and round; tense and relaxed; beautiful and incomprehen-



From the streets: Debbie Zehnder has got urban dance down to a T!



Physical theater: Romain Guion offers his contemporary dance in Zurich theaters.

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More about our partner: » [p.106](#)

sible. Romain's intense blue eyes are ablaze, and his lengthy answers attest to profound absorption in his chosen art form. When asked to define his interpretation of the term "space," he says "If you shape the body, it can be space."

The very air of Zurich suddenly seems saturated with rhythm. The click-clack of high heels on cobbled pavements. The whirring of bicycle spokes. Falling leaves perform pirouettes; windscreen wipers dance a duet, pigeons appear to be voguing on power lines, the waves on Lake Zurich ripple gently in a display of dazzling choreography. It's as though the city can't wait for others to join in the dance.

LET'S DANCE!

GESSNERALLEE

Close to Zurich's central station, this venue is a bastion of independent theater and dance in Switzerland. For a mere CHF 16, visitors get to enjoy artists from all over the world. And right next door is the Reithalle restaurant, with its magnificent garden!
» gessnerallee.ch

OPERNHAUS

The award-winning Opera House showcases both big voices and fleet-footed dancers from the world of ballet.
» opernhaus.ch

ROTE FABRIK

This former factory is the cultural counterpoint to the traditional institutions found in the city center, with a dance club and performances in the old factory theater.
» rotefabrik.ch

TANGO

Tango fans: this venue close to Hardbrücke station is not to be missed. The Club Silbando, or El Social, regularly hosts dance events in the afternoons and evenings – swing lovers are also welcome!
» tango.ch » elsocial.ch

SALSA

Visit the Salsarica in Pfingstweidstrasse for Salsa, Bachata and other forms of dance – Mondays and weekends. From May until September, there will be outdoor Rueda events every Wednesday night at the Bürkliplatz pavilion.
» salsarica.ch » stz.ch

SWING

Volkshaus Zurich offers courses and Sunday social dancing events, while the Helvetic Shag'n'Shuffle takes place in Zurich in May. » downtownswing.ch
» helveticshagnshuffle.ch

TANZHAUS

This new center is for professional dancers, but every May it stages the "Zürich Tanz" Dance Festival – an event for everyone! All the dancers profiled here will be part of the action.
» zuerichtanzt.ch
» tanzhaus-zuerich.ch

URBAN DANCE

The Offdance studio offers courses, and newbies can try out different dance styles at the Stylize Summer Session.
» offdance.ch
» stylizeproductions.ch