

Ballroom and Ballet Dancing at Age 94

By Irene Kovar

Six years ago at a Harvest Ball Ohio Chapter 2024, Tom Heffelfinger caught the attention of the audience by introducing May Morabito as “The Diva of Ballroom Dance” in our area. Now at the age of 94 she is still competing in International-style Ballroom Dance whenever possible. At the Northcoast Ballroom Championship competition she has had first high score in solo with each one of her instructors. Here is how this little Diva came about:

May was born in Buffalo, New York in 1917 to a mother who was Irish/Scottish and father who was English. She was raised with her family in Orchard Park, New York subsequently moving to New Jersey. There she married her first husband and moved to New York City. In New York May studied art and costume design. She speaks very highly of her two talented and handsome sons, Binns and Matthew Handy of New York. Her husband (a photographer) was in the service and was ultimately transferred to NASA in Cleveland, Ohio. May did commercial art for many of the Cleveland department stores, mainly Bobbie Brooks, Dalton, Bradley, and Kenrob. Her art appeared in daily newspapers and in Slick Magazine. May was a commercial artist for 46 years.

After separating from her first husband May started dancing at Arthur Murray Dance Studio in downtown Cleveland above the State Theater (this would later become American Ballroom Centre). There she met Armond, who had come to learn the Cha-Cha. He had his eye out for another lady who did not show up. May says, “Sometimes it is good to be at the right place at the right time.” They have been married for 34 years. Vic Dominic owned the downtown Arthur Murray Studio when May started dancing in 1970. She studied American Bronze for at least one year. Her first instructor was Jose Fontenez, followed by Steve Hadley, Ray Bishop, Gordon Kwan, Stan Tylowe (her first Standard instructor) and now Jim Ferris of Always Dancin’. May said, “I warned Jim that I’ve worn out many instructors. I’m happy to report he plans to be around for a long time.”

When she first started ballroom dancing it was suggested to May to take ballet classes. She took classes at Margaret Duncan Studio for 2 ½ years. Later in life as she danced with Jim Ferris, May decided to take up ballet classes again. She has been taking private ballet classes with me (Irene Kovar) for the last 11 years, and she says it has benefited her ballroom dancing. “It makes me feel good,” she says. May continues to take private ballroom classes with Jim Ferris focusing mostly on Standard, but she still

enjoys Latin. She also takes her weekly private ballet class with me as usual. “Dancing is a very special part of life for many of us”, she says.

May is a very special lady in many of our lives, kind loving and considerate. She designs, alters and makes many of our ballroom dresses, often staying up nights to meet a deadline. Her current sewing project is pole dance costumes. Each is individually designed. At this time 40 are made with many more to go. I am always fascinated by her creativity. May says, “I love it, I would like to do a few more.”

“We are fortunate to have so many talented and excellent teachers in our area” says May.

“NOW LET’S DANCE”

