

# Rhythm Explosion brings dancers from all over the world to Bozeman

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By **GAIL SCHONTZLER**, Chronicle Staff Writer |

It was the feeling of joy that got Katherine Kramer hooked on tap dance.

Living in New York City in the 1970s, Kramer was a young modern dancer who loved going to lofts and seeing legendary dancers like "Honi" Coles and "Cookie" Cook, who could tap out amazing rhythms with their feet.

"When I watched these master performers, I felt so much joy," Kramer said. "The fact it was so playful really interested me."

Now Kramer, 56, is sharing the joy of tap dancing and other forms of dances from around the world with fellow dance teachers and students in Bozeman.

She is hosting Rhythm Explosion - nine days of classes, workshops and performances July 19 through 27 at the Emerson Cultural Center.

One of the highlights will be an appearance by 80-year-old Jimmy Slyde, winner of the 2002 Hooper Award from the American Tap Dance Foundation, and Sarah Petronio, 63, winner of the 2005 Hooper Award, who danced together in Paris for many years.

Classes will be taught during the festival in everything from tap and jazz dance to salsa, improvisation, body percussion, Cuban drumming and Brazilian capoeira - an acrobatic dance developed by slaves that's like a martial art.

Even people who don't know the difference between the waltz and Watusi can still enjoy three performances:

€ The major show will be at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, July 22, when Rhythm Explosion dance teachers and musicians perform in the Emerson Theater.

€ On Tuesday, July 24 at 7 p.m., there will be "an evening with legendary tap masters Jimmy Slyde and Sarah Petronio." It will be a more intimate interaction in the Emerson Ballroom, and include videos.

€ On Friday, July 27, Rhythm Explosion will go out with a bang with a big Performance Dance party at 8 p.m., featuring student performances and social dancing to Lanzallamas Monofonica, a Latin fusion band from Miami.

This is the 10th anniversary for Rhythm Explosion, which Kramer has started holding every other year. It began in 1996, with just Kramer and three other teachers working with 25 students. That first year, her fellow dance teachers camped out in her half-finished cabin on Skunk Creek Road. Now the dance festival has grown to a dozen faculty members and 60 to 75 students, coming from as far away as Singapore.

"This year there's people from Paris and Brazil coming to Skunk Creek Road," Kramer said with a smile. Kramer's credits include teaching Robert Redford the two-step for "The Horse Whisperer" movie and teaching wedding dance steps to soap stars in "As the World Turns." A trim, athletic blonde, she teaches dance at Florida International University in Miami and spends summers in Bozeman, where she and her husband plan to retire.

Petronio wrote in an e-mail that she agreed to be part of Rhythm Explosion in Montana "because I admire Katherine Kramer's 'spunk.'" "No easy task producing a festival."

Petronio has taught rhythm tap dancing in France for 32 years. Jimmy Slyde has been her mentor, dancing partner

and friend of her family for 27 years. Her daughter, Leela Petronio, a tap dancer and body percussionist in her own right, also will teach and perform at Rhythm Explosion. "This is what Katherine wanted - three generations, sharing the experiences and perpetuating the love of tap dancing," Sarah Petronio wrote.

She and Jimmy Slyde had a jazz and tap show in Paris in the 1980s called "It's About Time."

In addition to performing in jazz-loving France, Petronio has taught and performed in Russia, Israel, Japan, Spain, Germany, India, Australia and the United States.

Tap dancing's heyday was in the Big Band swing era of the 1930s and 1940s, Kramer said. It started to fall out of favor after World War II, as jazz music turned to bebop and became more of a listeners' than a dancers' art form and as Americans stayed home to watch television and vaudeville theaters closed.

Tap has been enjoying a renaissance, particularly as a small group of mainly women dancers got an older generation of master dancers to teach, she said. The late Gregory Hines was an important part of the revival, as were movies like the 1989 "Tap," Broadway shows like "Jelly's Last Jam," and a younger dancer Savion Glover, who co-choreographed the dancing penguins in the animated "Happy Feet."

"The kernel that's really at the heart of jazz is listening and improvisation," Kramer said. "It's my little part to put the right energy in the world. There's not enough listening, not enough being present, not enough play. And learning to improvise works with all those things - learning to be open, flexible. It's a simple and creative way to try to do my part."

Her son, Kenneth, is a percussionist with the band, and that

also ties into her ideas for this festival.

"I'm interested in looking at family and tradition and how we pass things on to the next generation, and the importance of honoring where something comes from," she said.

"I'm interested in people feeling more joy."

Tickets are on sale at the Emerson, 111 S. Grand Ave.

For Sunday night's performance, tickets cost \$20 general, \$15 for seniors and students, or \$10 for children 12 and under. For Tuesday and Friday performances, tickets are \$10.

For more information, check online

[www.RhythmExplosion.com](http://www.RhythmExplosion.com) or phone 686-4307.