

# Meet Midtown Dance Instructors:

# EM MA & ER IN

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VoyageATL

## Today we'd like to introduce you to **Emma Burke & Erin Connolly**

Burke Connolly is the product of two childhood Irish Dance friends. At a coffee shop in Virginia Highland in 2011, two young women reminisced about old times together, the fun they had while dancing, and their iconic, unforgettable Irish dance teacher who had left such an impression on their lives. It had been 10 years since they had seen each other, and Erin Connolly had recently moved back to Atlanta from Chicago. It was there, over two cups of coffee, that the idea for a new and innovative Irish dance school was born: the Burke Connolly Academy of Irish Dance.

At that time, Emma was a business litigation attorney who was being named partner at her law firm. Erin was a successful commercial architect at the height of her career with a husband and their first baby on the way. The big question was: Where would they find the time? Despite all the years building their careers, their passion for Irish dance never left them—and they knew it was now or never: They found a church hall and began teaching two days a week out of a church community center.

They realized immediately they had created something special. Within a year, they had outgrown the church. They built out an Irish dance studio and never looked back: The Burke Connolly community was thriving, and parents and students couldn't get enough! The passion, excitement, and energy Emma and Erin had for their students, Irish dance and Irish culture was contagious.

Since its founding, the Burke Connolly has continued to grow inside the school and out. Erin and her husband, Kenny, now have three beautiful children: Declan, Riordan, and Margaret, and Emma met and married her husband, Pat. The studio has grown to over 100 students...and counting.

Check out some of her work below:





Through focus and a unified vision, Emma and Erin have developed 3 incredible programs:

1. a memorable Recreational Program for students and parents who want a unique, extracurricular program their kids can fall in love with and be active and make friends;
2. an exciting Performance Based Program that performs lively crowd-pleasing routines at festivals throughout the year, and
3. a boldly Competitive Program, recognized by the international governing body of Irish Dance, An Commissun La Rince Gaelica. Our dancers are world-class—having qualified for Regional, National, and World Championships!

All three programs combine energetic Irish Step Dancing, and elements Irish culture with innovative and engaging teaching techniques, for a truly inspiring experience. All programs have a commitment to challenge and inspire each student to be their best.

Emma and Erin have been friends for over 20 years—a friendship that began in their childhood Irish dance classes. While they never anticipated the course that friendship would take in those 20 years, they have found in Burke Connolly a community of dancers and their families that bring them joy daily.

### Has it been a smooth road?

We operate in a niche market— not everyone has heard of Irish dance, or even know its an option in Atlanta. That was our number 1 challenge at the beginning: getting the word out. Thankfully, we have grown an amazing community of supportive parents and students who love us and share their experiences freely, and because of that, our community continues to grow every year. It was tempting at the beginning to try to offer something to everyone. We offered classes from ages 5 to Adult. Our Adult classes were a lot of fun to teach, but our passion was teaching children. Once we narrowed our focus, we able to create even more memorable experiences for our students— which is what we're all about!

### When you look back, can you point to a period when you wanted to quit or a period that was really frustrating?

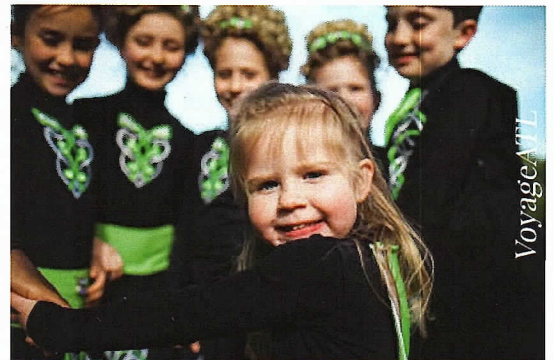
Not once! You know you've found your passion when you wake up at 3am with new choreography in your head and have to run to another room to work it out (so you don't disturb your poor sleeping husband!). Erin and I love this so much. Don't get me wrong, we have met our challenges and learning moment along the way. The biggest challenge has been juggling everything — We are proud of the school we have created, but we have a big vision for what Irish Dance and Burke Connolly will become! The challenge is finding the time to work on the next phase while maintaining all the moving parts we've already created. We've learned that organization, communication...and a sense of humor...are key! The tough moments come— but we know we can only control one side of the equation. During those times, we lean on each other, remind ourselves this is only a set back on our journey, and keep moving forward! So far, that's worked for us!

### What would you tell someone who is just starting out?

Be authentic. Consumers are smart, and in service-based industries like dance, the client's experience is everything. Know your core values and communicate them to your staff and clients—and then live them. It creates a community you will be proud to have built.

### What are you looking forward to?

We have developed so much traction in the past year and a half, and it's been really energizing. We spent a long time building our business model and the excitement stems from seeing the fantastic results! Not only are we growing, but our parents are more involved and have a greater understanding of what their kids are learning and accomplishing in class. Our students are advancing technically, but also in their self-confidence and creativity. Best of all, everyone has an immense amount of pride that they are part of Burke Connolly!



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