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Rince na Chroi, a St. Paul-based Irish dance school, will perform in its second annual recital Saturday, March 3 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, March 4 at 2 p.m.

“From the Stage to Your Heart” will feature traditional Irish dance numbers that students have been practicing since fall. After an enormously successful show last year, which oversold by almost 20 tickets, the school is aiming to sell out two shows instead of one.

Founded by Katie Stephens, 27, who opened the school in 2003, Rince na Chroi (pronounced Rink-ah nah Cree) started with just 15 students in its first year. In 2005, its enrollment totaled 100 students, and in just the last year it has added another 30 students to its roster. At this rate of growth, Stephens now offers classes four days a week to accommodate all of the students, who range in age from three years old to adults.

Stephens is a Milwaukee, Wisc., native and a graduate of the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, where she now works full time in the Alumni Association. Juggling a full-time job and the demands of a successful dance school can be a lot to handle, she admits, but it is worth it to do something she loves. Stephens eventually hopes to run the school full time.

Her love for Irish dance comes from her nineteen years of experience as a student and a teacher, 11 of which were spent traveling the world as a competitive dancer. She ended her career at the championship level, the highest level in Irish dance competition.

Stephens’ expertise and teaching style are what attract many of her students.

“Katie is honest and has a great sense of humor,” says Kate Ortman, 25, a dancer for one year. “She does a great job of balancing constructive criticism and positive reinforcement. Plus, her technique is incredible.”

Stephens, who does not actively advertise, says the growth is mainly due to word-of-mouth. Ortman says it is also due to Stephens’ broad networking base.

“I went to school with Katie,” she says. “I am in this because of her and I didn’t even know her that well. It’s the first thing I’ve committed so much time and money to since I started working and I’m so glad I did it.”

Another important exposure tool for the school has been its frequent appearances at Twin Cities events and festivals and on local news shows, including Irish Fair and KARE 11 news. This past year, the school added performances at the Minnesota Twins and Swarm games to its resume. It also performed with popular Irish acts such as Gaelic Storm, Natalie MacMaster, Eileen Ivers, Five Mile Chase and the Minnesota Police Pipe Band.

Five Mile Chase, who will repeat their appearance at this year's shows, is a high-energy Irish music duo based in St. Paul, melding Irish jigs, reels and songs with 21st century musicianship to create a traditional yet modern sound. With two albums under their belt, Five Mile Chase has extensively toured the Midwest, appearing in a number of festivals and on Minnesota Public Radio.

The Minnesota Police Pipe Band, another repeat performer from last year's show, is a non-profit organization as well as a competition and performance pipe and drum corps. They frequently perform at parades and events around Minnesota throughout the year; they played in their first national performance last May during National Police Week in Washington, D.C.

Classes at Rince na Chroi are offered Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings and Sunday afternoons, depending on level. Prospective dancers are welcome to visit classes throughout the year. Tickets to "From the Stage to Your Heart" are \$15 and can be purchased through Ticket Works at 651-209-6689 or through their Web site, www.ticketworks.com. For lesson or show inquiries, call (651) 645-4292 or visit www.rincenachroi.com.

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