

# Off the floor ...

## *It takes two !*

### *Robert & Michelle*

It is exactly five years since Robert Fletcher and Michelle Palmer took over the Yagoona class on Monday evenings.

And according to their students, it's the best class in town!

The class was previously run by Michael Vera-Lobos who asked them if they would take it on the occasional evening when he couldn't. Eventually, due to Michael's work commitments, Robert and Michelle took over on a permanent basis in 2005. That same year, they became part of Northern Riders Linedancing.

#### **They began to dance.**

Michelle first started with Gordon Elliott at the Picton Woolshed. "My 11 year old niece had told me how great linedancing was, so I decided to give it a go. That was 15 years ago and I never dreamt that one day I would be teaching and choreographing my own dances."

Robert says he started in 1996 at the Greyhound Club with Tina Salvestro. "As I worked at the Club, I just went along with a friend to see if everything was OK. It didn't take much encouragement for me to join in.

"My favourite dance back then was *One Good Reason*. Now it's *Jesse James*."



Michelle says when she first started, every dance was her favourite dance! "Until Gordon taught *Wildest Dreams*, which became my real favourite. My two favourites now are *Don't Let This Moment End* and *Nitty Gritty*."

#### **While Robert and Michelle now choreograph together, they started out on their own.**

Robert started to choreograph around 2003 after going to Strictly Linedance classes with Michael Vera-Lobos and Noel Bradey.

"There was a song on the Coyote Ugly soundtrack which I really liked and Michael said why don't you try choreographing a dance to it. So I did. It was an upper beginner dance called *Didn't We*.

"I then choreographed *Take my Breath Away* with Michael and a fun little dance called *Drinkin' Bone* with both Noel and Michael."

**"About nine years ago, whenever I visited the Club I would stand at the door and watch the dancing. One night, Robert came over and invited me to join them, so I did.**

**I really like the people in the class. The togetherness is lovely and it has become like a second home to me.**

**Robert and Michelle are pretty groovy too!"**

**Monika**



**So how does it work?**

Michelle: “One of us (usually me!) will hear a piece of music and play it to the other. If we both like it, we go from there.

“We count out the beats, decide whether it will be two walls or four, how long the dance will be, tags and restarts.

Robert is great at hearing the beats, whether it should be syncopated or straight counts.”

Michelle started in 1996. “Gordon was holding a choreography competition and I entered my first dance, *South West Cha Cha*. It came first in the Beginner Section and was also Overall Winner. So I was very chuffed!

“But I didn’t choreograph again until 2004, when Michael asked me to choreograph a dance for his beginner class. It was called *Off My Rocker*,” says Michelle.

“Then in 2006, I heard the song *Here I Am* and just had to do a dance to it. So I asked Rob if he would help me and that was how we started choreographing together.”

Both agree it is their favourite dance they have choreographed together.

While they originally started because they saw a need for the right level of dances for their class, many of their dances are now popular on floors right across Australia.

Robert says he enjoys choreographing with Michelle because she is always so enthusiastic and motivated.

“We test each other’s ideas, play around with the steps to see what fits the music best. And then it just seems to fall in place.”

Michelle says the part she enjoys the most is when it all comes together and you see people dancing your dance. “You think ‘*Wow! We choreographed that*’.”



**“When my partner died, I wanted to get involved in something social. I used to do ballroom dancing when I was young so I decided to try line dancing. I had been to other classes and tried to pick it up, then when I came to Robert and Michelle the steps just seemed to click into place.**

**I have been coming for almost five years now. Everybody is so friendly and we have a great time.”**

**Sean**

***“It is really satisfying when you teach a dance to the class and they master it, especially one that is more difficult.***

***It is such a great feeling.”***

**Michelle**



*“The achievement is reflected in the joy on their faces.”*

*It just makes me feel so good.”*

*Robert*



**Competition beckoned!**

Robert and Michelle both participate in the competition side of dancing.

When Jenny Hughes asked Michelle if she would like to dance in a Northern Riders group at the annual Mildura competition, of course she said yes.

“It was very daunting as I had never done that work before, but I have been competing with them ever since,” says Michelle.

Robert started competing when Strictly Linedance and Northern Riders used to enter together.

“I enjoyed it so much that I decided to get a bit more involved,” he says.

“Jenny encouraged me and also provided the opportunity for me to further that desire. She is a great coach and has the enthusiasm and drive to get the best performance from her dancers.”

Apart from teaching and choreographing, Michelle finds the time and energy to go to other classes as well. “I go to Kelvin Dale on Tuesday nights, Jenny Hughes on Wednesday nights, Tracie Lee on Thursday nights and Mark Simpkin on Saturday mornings! So, yes, I am exhausted by the end of the week! But I wouldn’t have it any other way, as I really enjoy my dancing.”

**Robert and Michelle thoroughly enjoy taking their Monday class.**

“The students are great to teach. They are all very friendly and welcoming to new people or visitors,” says Michelle.

“What I enjoy most is teaching and going to socials. Everyone will tell you that I dance nearly every dance.

“And I enjoy working with Robert. He is so easy going and has become a very good friend.”

Robert says he enjoys all aspects of line dancing, especially the people. “The friendships that are formed are just incredible.”

**“I only came to learn one dance, ‘That’s Amore’. That was three years ago! It was such a good class and everybody was so nice I stayed.**

**Learning from two people can often give you different perspectives on the same steps, and I find that can be really helpful.”**

**Coral**