



VIRTUOSO
Performing Arts

October 2015

The Virtuoso Performing Arts Story

How Three Sisters Realized Their Childhood Dream

Twelve years ago, sisters Carrie Bohlmann, Annie Conway and Margaret Thompson realized their childhood dream of owning and running a dance studio. But it wasn't just a dance studio that they founded. What they had created was a place where all aspiring performing artists could go for quality training and education in acting, dance and music. Read on to find out how the VPA we know today came into existence.



Margaret, Annie & Carrie at their first space in Niles circa 2006.

Carrie, Annie and Margaret all studied dance from a very young age. They grew up training at a dance studio in Waukesha, Wisconsin called Accent On Dance (AOD). There, they learned the basics and beyond from AOD founder, Mary Cummings, and her daughter, Kellie Plath who is the current owner. They often role-played at home and fantasized about one day owning a studio together. Part of their training at AOD included apprenticeships, which allowed them to assist their instructors in the classroom. Ultimately,

they were each offered teaching positions at AOD.

The three sisters each went on to pursue a bachelor's degree in Dance Performance. Carrie attended Oklahoma City University and graduated from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Annie and Margaret graduated from Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Shortly after, and while Margaret (the youngest) was finishing her degree, Carrie and Annie moved to Chicago to pursue their dance careers. While gaining audition experience and landing some performance opportunities, they made their living by teaching dance. It was around this time they realized that teaching was the path they so desired for their careers and started to talk about the idea of opening a dance studio together, the same way they had done when they were younger. They called Margaret, still a college student in Dallas, to see if she would be interested in joining them in this endeavor. Of course she said "Yes!" and found a way to graduate early so that she could join them in the start-up phase.

The name of the new studio was originally set out to be Virtuoso Dance Center; however, while writing the business plan, this changed as Carrie and Annie came to a game-changing resolution. They shared with each other the experiences of disappointment they had each encountered after going on an audition and being asked to sing or act, having had no prior experience in either department. It was regretful and nerve wracking to not have studied the voice and acting they needed to confidently land the

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jobs that required a triple threat for the position. They decided it would be beneficial to their dance students to be able to offer them acting, dance and music training all under one roof. Hence, Virtuoso Dance Center became Virtuoso Performing Arts.

In January 2004, Virtuoso Performing Arts was born in Niles, Illinois at the Four Flaggs Shopping Center. They started with 12 students and 6 faculty members; twelve years later they have grown to around 300 students with 18 faculty members. They relocated in 2009 to Glenview and are now proudly located at 8120 Lehigh Road in Morton Grove, Illinois.

“It’s been quite a wild ride throughout the last twelve years working with my sisters”, says Carrie. “It was difficult in the beginning to be patient as we figured out each other’s strengths as business owners. I think it was hard because in order to find your strengths you have to admit your weaknesses. Once that was established it became much easier to run the business together.”

VPA offers the following programs, beginning through advanced levels, to students from preschool through high school.

- Weekly classes in acting, dance, musical theater, voice and, most recently, tumbling. Programs are offered Fall-Spring, Winter-Spring & Summer.
- VPA’s School of Music offers private and duo lessons in guitar, piano and voice year-round.
- Classes and private students all have the opportunity to perform annually.
- VPA’s Dance Company is comprised of it’s most driven dance students who compete and perform several times per year around the community.
- In the summer, VPA’s popular Musical Theater Camp is the highlight, showcasing a different musical each summer.
- Dance Intensives are also offered in the summer time.

VPA looks forward to continuing to offer quality performing arts education to the community for many years to come.