



He has been called the Tony Bartuccio of the noughties, working with some of the biggest names in the entertainment and fashion industry. He runs one of the biggest dance schools in Australia that trains dancers that perform on stage and screen nationally and internationally. He also runs a talent agency and now a brand new production company that is about to produce its first touring show, *Ooh La La*. Meet dancer, choreographer, teacher and model, Todd Patrick.

Todd Patrick was born and raised in Adelaide, in a very straight surf suburb called Norlunga. As you might imagine, there weren't a lot of opportunities for creative types in Norlunga, especially back then. He was openly gay, but with his imposing height, big mouth and tough attitude, he was never really given a hard time, at least not to his face. With little or no real outlet for his pent up energies aside from a school Rock Eisteddfod, the physically driven and misunderstood Patrick, acted out. It wasn't too long before he was expelled from school for being 'out of control.' Those few ventures into dance with the Rock Eisteddfod pointed Patrick in a direction where he found focus and passion.

"I often say 'dance saved my life' because I was quite badly behaved when I was a teenager and at school. In fact I drove teachers and my parents crazy. I was always doing something I shouldn't have! Without the direction that dance brought in to my life I really don't know where I would have ended up."

After being expelled he was moved to a performing arts high school. Life was different there. The emphasis on creativity and expression appealed to him, and within no time he embraced and excelled in art, drama, performance and especially dance. His talent and drive was apparent, and doors to the entertainment industry opened for him.

Todd's performing career started at Walt Disney Studios, touring with their shows throughout Asia as a singer and dancer. In particular, Patrick fell in love with Korea.

"I loved it. I was based in the W Hotel in Seoul. The show was filled with European and Brazilian dancers. The food... the city... I just fell in love with it. They don't believe in gay so they pretend it's not there. Straight men would hold hands everywhere. The Koreans are very fashion forward. Boys would wear skirts in the streets designed by Gucci and Galliano and not get a second look. It was fantastic! And I had a great partner that was there with the American army. There were 45,000 troops there and it felt like 40,000 were in the gay clubs!"

And then he received an amazing offer to move to Europe and become a principal dancer at the prestigious Lido in Paris, France. Terrified and excited, Patrick accepted the rare opportunity that would become a major career highlight.

“I will always remember my first night in Paris. Jet lagged and not speaking a word of French, I went backstage at the Lido surrounded by 20 different languages, the most amazing looking dancers and costumes. It was a moment I went ‘wow! I must have done something right somewhere to be here!’.

“Then my director told me to look down, and standing in the venue was fashion designer John Galliano. He was looking for a venue for Dior’s new perfume, and he chose the Lido. Giselle was the face of it! All of a sudden, I was a part of it... It was just so bizarre, crazy and wonderful!”

As a soloist or principle dancer, his extensive training in a vast variety of dance styles, as well as gymnastics, gave him an edge rarely seen from male dancers. Not surprisingly, following his efforts for Dior at the Lido where he worked alongside Giselle Bündchen, John Galliano and Karl Lagerfeld, the good looking Patrick was also quickly selected for work in the fashion industry as a model, working at Fashion Weeks in Australia, Asia and Europe. In recent years has choreographed and modelled for such names as MAC Cosmetics, Christian Dior, Versace, Issey Miyake, as well as dancing in major companies throughout Asia, Europe and Australia.

As an openly gay man, does Patrick feel that his sexuality helped or hindered his progress in the industry?

“I decided right from the beginning that I would not hide my sexuality. It’s not a big deal. It has nothing to do with how I teach, work or choreograph. I don’t think it ever held me back, and in fact I think it was an asset. Gay people are naturally very creative. I think it’s a blessing and I don’t want to be anything else.

“In Australia there is a large percentage of gay people in dance but overseas it’s much smaller. In some companies, I was the only gay dancer. Dance is a part of Europe’s culture and it’s not seen as gay or effeminate for men to dance. Australia is catching up but we are a young country are culture and history is still being created.”

Since returning back full time to Melbourne, Todd has made his mark on the industry by being awarded choreography contracts for major campaigns, launches, video clips and live shows. He choreographed for the *Countdown – The Arena Spectacular*, the Australian movie premiere of *Hairspray* and Melbourne’s infamous 2009 *Sensation NYE* party. Then there are a myriad of massive corporate gigs.

He performed and choreographed for pop artists Dannii Minogue, Vanessa Amorosi, Ricki Lee Coulter and Zoe Badwi in film clips, TV appearances and live performances. He has become the resident choreographer for gay club, the Market Hotel, working his choreography skills with international DJs and dance legends like Inaya Day, Barbara Tucker, Peyton and DJ Frankie Knuckles.

Todd Patrick’s wish list includes Lady Gaga, Australian filmmaker Baz Luhrmann and fashion designer Tom Ford. Given that he’s worked in so many high profile gigs with some big star names, has Patrick ever felt starstruck?

“I don’t really get star struck. The closest I’ve come to it was when I was at the AFI awards and I met Baz Luhrmann! I couldn’t really talk... I think he’s amazing. But I meet real stars everyday. I teach them! Kids that work there ass off with not much support, and the kids that really try to make something of themselves... now they knock the wind out of me!”

Most importantly, Patrick began his own dance studio, Patrick Studios Australia, which has become one of the biggest full time dance training schools in Australia with over 82 in the program, and 200 in the school. He considers it one of his proudest achievements.

“I wanted to offer dancers a course that I always wanted to do. I was so pissed off with the standard of dancers coming out of a lot of the full time dance schools. Many of the available courses are just money making ventures... They cost so much and dancers were coming out destroyed and not even wanting to dance! There are some great schools out there but there are more bad ones ! Creating the Clover agency was a natural progression, to help guide the graduating students into the industry.”

Patrick also opened the Clover Agency to support his talents’ needs, and more recently his own production company, Kissing Bee Productions, where he can not only train the students but put them in to the industry. With amazing

dancers from right across Australia, Kissing Bee's first show *Ooh La La* will open and start touring Victoria at the end of March.

Not surprisingly some have drawn parallels between Patrick and legend of dance entertainment, Tony Bartuccio whose influence dominated 80's and 90's entertainment. In fact, Todd Patrick Studios also occupies the former site of Bartuccio's dance academy. So how does he feel about the comparison?

"Tony was and still is an amazing man. He did great things for dance in Australia, and it's an honour to have such a comparison... I hope to last as long as he has, and to have that level of influence."

Patrick's students are now following in his footsteps and can be seen around the world in shows like *Wicked*, *Shout*, *Chicago* and *42nd Street*, in venues across Europe including The Lido and the Moulin Rouge, music videos, TV programs, cruise ships, commercial functions and fashion parades with highly acclaimed directors and choreographers.

"Dancing is and will always be a highlight for me. And so is getting my students into shows, working with great talents. Right now opening the production company is something I'm very proud of. I feel I have a lot to be proud of and excited about. And there's still so much more to come."