

CREATING MEMORIES TO CHERISH FOR A LIFETIME



An interview with

VINCENT VERBEEK (WEDDINGDANCE®)

As one of the most enduring wedding day traditions, the first dance forms an unforgettable part of the celebrations, providing newlyweds with the chance to showcase their unity, all while having tremendous fun. Marking a new beginning, the first dance is deeply personal, and despite everyone's eyes in the room being firmly glued to the happy couple, they are sure to feel that time is standing still, and they are the only ones around, even if this lasts just for a few moments.

Nevertheless, those eyes do exist alongside the weight of such a momentous occasion. As such, couples will want to be as prepared as possible for their first dance, ensuring they have honed (or even built-up) their skills, memorised routines, and put it all together with music they have chosen in good time. To help couples achieve that, professional dance school WEDDINGDANCE® teaches them. Here we spoke to Co-Founder Vincent Verbeek to find out more about the range of services offered, his top tips for selecting music and incorporating friends and family into routines, as well as his hopes for the future.

What are the main services provided by WEDDINGDANCE®?

At WEDDINGDANCE®, we provide what we like to call a "having the time of your life" experience for couples getting married. We aim to achieve the maximum development of our client's skills while ensuring they have as much fun as possible.

In your opinion, how important is the first dance to the overall wedding celebration, and how early should couples begin preparing for this memorable moment?

Our research has shown that the wedding dance takes second place on the list of most important wedding moments – right after the highly anticipated "I dos". In terms of creating the right atmosphere, the wedding dance proves crucial, especially to evening festivities. Couples who want a really simple and short routine ranging between one-and-a-half and two minutes long can start practising about

three to four months before the wedding. For more advanced projects, it can take six months to one year to train the bride and groom. One last minute training session actually took place on the evening before the wedding day. This session lasted just two hours. Conversely, we have also undertaken a 45-hour project comprising five ballroom dances for the main wedding dance and five Latin dances to be showcased as part of a surprise in the later evening – with both routines totalling a sweat-inducing 13 minutes.

Furthermore, some couples even begin preparations about a year and a half before the big day, especially when they have to factor in kids and busy lives. By giving themselves more than enough time, couples can not only ensure they are well prepared but also enjoy themselves a lot more. Essentially, when you need to start classes really depends on the situation you are in. We have completed 20-hour projects within a one-month timeframe – something which can be done if you have

the time. Bear in mind, however, that individual couples' needs and wishes are taken into account, as well as their experience and possible dancing background.

Nevertheless, even when you start early, a lot of unexpected things can occur, so you want to be as prepared as possible with plenty of time to ensure you have the most amazing experience. On average, we start six to nine months before the wedding date.

What dance styles do WEDDINGDANCE®'s professional trainers specialise in, and how complex are the routines?

Most of our trainers have a background in ballroom competition dancing, with some additional experience in other dance styles such as salsa. On top of that, all of our trainers go through an intense internal training programme that ensures they have the required level of skill to train our couples.



Of course, being able to present the training content through a client's individual frame of reference plays a key role here. As such, we use everything we know about a specific client and their unique wishes and wants to tailor choreographies, mixes, voice-overs, and videos to them. We encourage all of our trainers to have an active, healthy lifestyle and to dedicate time to expanding their skills. As a result of such work, the routines we create for our clients can range from a simple one-and-a-half-minute dance to a slow-paced routine reminiscent of those on professional dance shows.

Can you tell us more about your online training offering and to whom this option is most suited?

Typically, when people begin planning their wedding dance, they start by searching for specific choreography for a certain song they like. They then soon find out that this method actually misses some basic steps and often leads to disagreements.

The best way to begin tackling the first dance and learning how to move is by starting with a trial session, during which our trainers determine what individual couples need moving forward based on their experience and dancing background, as well as their wishes

and wants. For couples who have no clear picture of what they want to do, we are able to show them some videos of couples who prepared their wedding dance with us in the past. Then we start by going through our basic techniques programme – this is something we do with online sessions through live video calls. In the future, we will be able to offer this through video training as well.

What is most important is that the contents of this phase are tailored to the couple and the songs they choose. We don't waste time on basics that are not used in the choreography. This also involves (for example) dancing to the rhythm of the music as well as leading and following skills. After addressing the basic techniques, we move on to the choreography phase, during which couples complete 55 minutes of online training together with one of our trainers or use the pre-recorded choreography instruction videos we have specifically curated. Most clients use both.

When the choreography is learnt by heart, we move on to the final phase – the performance. This is when we really start dancing, firstly by filling in the knowledge gaps and then rehearsing the entire routine to music. We work on things like presentation and expressions, fine-tuning all elements to make sure they are

ready for the wedding day. This final phase also involves some mind-set and visualisation techniques.

Anyone with a good connection to the internet and a video call setup can do the online training sessions. Working with our videos rather than taking lessons offline has proved especially fruitful for couples with the discipline to put enough time into it. The biggest increase in training results is reached because clients can watch such videos repeatedly until they have absorbed all there is to know. Another advantage is the slow-motion playback feature. Couples who opt for video lessons or the prepared choreography videos can watch them on their TV, and it is even possible to use VR headsets, which help clients feel like they are actually standing in one of our studios with a trainer.

We also cater to many couples who live outside of The Netherlands and those with young children who can really benefit from online sessions, especially as the latter can be with their little ones. This way, they don't need to make arrangements with a babysitter. It also eliminates travel times, so if you live in a place with lots of traffic, this can save you a lot of time.

For those hoping to draw their parents and closest friends into routines, what choreography is most recommended, and how are lessons structured to ensure all have the chance to perfect their moves?

A routine with the parents is something we like to include in the party programme separately from the first dance itself. People have a tendency to compare things, and if you put the dance with the parents just after the wedding dance, it will not look as good as the dance performed by their happy couple, even worse, it could be seen as boring.

Most parents aren't as flexible or as trained as our wedding couples. In dancing, anyone over 35 years old is considered a senior. As you grow older, you lose a lot of flexibility and strength, and as such, it is harder to keep up. Therefore, we keep the dances with the parents fairly simple. There are exceptions, of course – for example, we had one father that did a really cool Blues Brothers-inspired wedding dance with his daughter because her husband didn't want to do a wedding dance with her.

Talking about closest friends, working with more people can be challenging for couples because it requires everyone involved to be available at certain times, and their skill levels may vary enormously. In these cases, we tend to stick to working with video. Typically, we ask that everyone prepares individually, with the entire group only getting together a couple of times yet still delivering a great result.

Do you have any tips for couples struggling to curate the perfect playlist? How important is the selection of music to the overall mood of the wedding?

I believe the selection of music plays a key role in creating the right mood. The music needs to be right for the wedding theme and has to work with the feel of the various parts of the day. At the same time, it needs to align with who you are. Some couples have a special song, or even more than one, that reminds them of how they met or when they got engaged.

When couples are not sure, I usually advise them to make a shortlist with a certain number of songs. Any song you hear and really like or that gets you emotional goes on the list. When the list has reached the set number, you're only allowed to add another if one is taken off in compensation. This way, you get a better and better list. Also, it's important to be aware of current trends, as some songs may be more time-sensitive than others – something considered a hit this year can be old next year.

While some couples like to think of what their guests might like, I do not recommend this. The choices you make have to be for you and not for somebody else. I believe that if there is one day in your life that you can make exactly as you would want it, it is your wedding day – this principle is sacrosanct.

From your experience, what are the most popular first dance songs?

One of the most chosen songs of all time is (*I've Had*) *The Time of My Life* from the famous *Dirty Dancing* movie. Disney songs are also very popular and we work with them every year. In the last few years, we have also choreographed dances to many Ed Sheeran songs, including the ever-popular *Thinking Out Loud* and *Perfect*. Additionally, we create a lot of choreographies set to Elvis, Queen, and Earth, Wind & Fire. Another category is songs from movies like *Harry Potter* and *James Bond*. More recently, we have also seen songs from popular streaming series, *The Chosen*.

What does WEDDINGDANCE's 360 video recording service entail, and how does it enable happy couples and their nearest and dearest to relive this most cherished of moments?

We have various possibilities for this – couples can rent the cameras, and for our VIP clients, we can also be present at the wedding to operate the equipment. 3603D video is the best way to experience your own wedding again, especially when coupled with a VR headset. It is like you are actually there again, and you can look around and see everything in 3D.

What does the future hold for WEDDINGDANCE? Are there any plans to establish further bases or expand service offerings, for example?

We are always looking for new trainers and hope to open new locations all over the world, but we go at a steady pace, tackling each objective one by one. We are optimistic that investors will take an interest in our business in the future as we have a lot of undiscovered potential. People who want to become a certified wedding dance trainer outside of The Netherlands can contact me if they are interested. It is paramount to realise that this is something that cannot easily be combined with other dancing activities. You really need to commit to wedding couples only because it takes a specialised approach to be able to do what we do.

There is a limit to how much more value you can add to the whole wedding dance experience when offering training, particularly in terms of the number of sessions required to create one. At a certain point, the value of an extra session brings less improvement. On the services side, we are now expanding further into videography around the preparation of the wedding dance itself. In the future, couples will thus be able to benefit from more video services. We share a lot of precious moments with our clients as they are personally growing, changing their mind-sets, and gaining more confidence. At the moment, we are looking into being able to offer our clients a video that relives these moments. The online training programmes will be further developed, with choreography options expanded so that online clients receive the same level of service as those that see us in person.



For more information on the services available or to book an online or in-person trial session, please visit www.openingsdans.com.

