

Amanda Salemi Burns Bright

The definition of fire dancing — *a performer dancing with objects such as knives, sticks and swinging rope set ablaze* — might scare some people, but not Amanda Salemi, who has been a fire dancer for roughly three years. Salemi had very little dance training before falling in love with the flame at age 28.

Salemi has always wanted to pursue dance, even taking some classes when she was younger before her parents encouraged her to try other sports. “I never went back [to dance], but I always wanted to,” said Salemi.

Her time to get back into dancing came when she was with a friend, the late Tim Davis, who was messing around with a set of light poi, which are the electronic, beginner version of fire poi. The fire poi are the small globes of flame attached to chains, commonly used in fire dancing. He let Amanda try them out, and when she did she, well, she crushed it, and a flame was sparked.

She did so well that Davis bought her her first set of light poi so she could continue practicing, and Salemi credits him with being one of the biggest reasons she began fire dancing. She calls Davis one of her greatest inspirations because he never gave up on her and always believed she could do it.

Once she received the light poi she practiced every day, improving her skill and falling in love with the dancing flames because with the dancing came other positive benefits. “I always felt so meditative and calm while doing it,” she says of her experience twirling the lights.



As much as she loved dancing with the lights, there came a day where she just thought, “I think I want to do fire,” much to her mother’s dismay who worried for her daughter’s safety. In fact, at Amanda’s first performance, her mother had to leave because watching her daughter dance with flames was too nerve racking. Since then, however, her mother has gotten on board with her daughter’s dreams and livelihood. She is now a proud and supportive fire-mom. Amanda mentions happily, “The whole thing amazes her now.”

As for the burning question that everyone is probably wondering, yes, Amanda has burned herself and gotten hurt while twirling fire. Once, while she was practicing a new move that she “was not ready to

try," she got too scared, doubting herself and burning her arm. Another instance was when she performed at her cousin's wedding and some fuel got onto her handles. When she lit up her equipment, she also lit her hands on fire. She has learned from that mistake and now carries the fuel away from her other equipment.

Although both experiences hurt her emotionally and physically, she says she had no problem getting back out there and attempting both tricks again, and has never felt in danger while performing on stage with the open flames. "It looks intimidating, but if you know what you're doing then you're fine." According to her, the only time she can remember being frightened was when she performed on top of a bus, but that was only because of the height. In her words she has "never been afraid of the flame."

In addition to being a free-spirited fire dancer, Salemi is the lead singer of the RI-based and 2018 Motif Music Aware nominee **Consuelo's Revenge**, a seven-piece group that plays a little bit of everything, including folk rock and gypsy folk with a strong bluesy vibe. Salemi always wanted to be a singer; she constantly wrote poetry and sang when she was younger but, like the dancing, it took a back seat to the rest of what was going on in her life.

Amanda joined the army right out of high school, where she stayed for six years. After leaving the army, Salemi attended CCRI for a semester, majoring in teaching with a minor in history. She left CCRI, had a son, Liam, and experienced one of the toughest years of her life, which ultimately led her back to singing. She explained that she needed the music. "It was either begin singing again, or lose my mind."

Consuelo's Revenge is getting back into the studio to record their third album, and Salemi is releasing her first solo album this summer, a long-time dream of hers. She also hopes to begin incorporating some of her music into her fire dancing performances. Her love for music is so intense that Salemi got a tattoo of a microphone with the wire wrapping all the way around her arm and eventually plugging into her chest, a symbol that the music is always in her heart. The tattoo also is for her father, who always encouraged her to pursue a career in music, and who passed away four years ago. "It's sort of like a memorial for him," said Salemi, "because basically all he ever wanted was for me to follow my dream."

Salemi is certainly following her dream, as the gigs for fire dancing multiply while the popularity of her band spreads, as Consuelo's Revenge is booking more and more shows. From eating fire to fronting a prospering band, there's an apparent flame that will continue to burn, fueled from deep inside Amanda's artistic heart.