

## Couple merges art & life

***Production stage manager and ballet dancer form duet as spouses, parents***

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**Written by Jackie Demaline**

Some of us stay busy during the holidays with decorating and shopping, cooking and entertaining guests. Then there are those who must busy themselves as well with entertaining audiences.

Meet Connie Dubinski and Zack Grubbs.

She's the production stage manager for Ensemble Theater of Cincinnati, currently staging "Snow White." He's a dancer – senior soloist – with the Cincinnati Ballet, currently staging "The Nutcracker."

They're also parents of 10-month-old daughter Quinn.

Dubinski came to Cincinnati in 2001; Grubbs in 2002.

Dubinski, a New Jersey native was a grad student in stage management at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music; Dallas native Grubbs was dancing with Boston Ballet when he signed on with Cincinnati Ballet.

Dubinski's first love was opera and while at CCM she worked every summer for Cincinnati Opera, first as an intern and then an assistant stage manager.

"I continued to come back to work there every summer – I even used my vacation time from my job at Lincoln Center to work one show. I lived and worked in New York, Miami, Washington D.C. and Chicago, but every summer I found myself in Cincinnati."

Dubinski and Grubbs first crossed paths in summer 2007 at Music Hall. Grubbs was a dancer in Cincinnati Opera's "Nixon in China," Dubinski was assistant stage manager for the opera.

On the first day of rehearsal, mutual friend Kim Hoerst, who at the time was in charge of props for the ballet and the opera, told them they needed to meet.

“When I found out he was a dancer I sort of snort-laughed and said thanks, but no thanks,” Dubinski recalled.

“On the way to rehearsal, Connie was in the hallway,” Grubbs remembered, “and I said to Kim, “Hey, she’s cute” ... to which Kim replied, “That’s her. That’s Connie, the girl I was telling you about.”

“I was leaving the rehearsal studio at Music Hall to check the sign-in sheet,” Dubinski picked up the story. “And when I opened the door there was Kim, clearing her throat pointedly, and right behind her was a ruggedly handsome man in a bandana.”

Grubbs finished, “After a few winks and smiles across the room, we started going out ... and the rest is history.”

That history includes marriage: baby Quincy Elizabeth (Quinn) will be 1 in February); and a home in Oakley. Grubbs, 33, is approaching 10 years with Cincinnati Ballet and Dubinski, 32, is in her third year as stage manager for Ensemble Theatre.

They always have a crazy-busy December. We asked them a few questions about merging their lives and careers in the performing arts.

**Question:** What’s the toughest part of your job?

**Dubinski:** At ETC, it’s all me, so that was an adjustment. And actually, I thrive at work when my job is more difficult. I love tech rehearsals because I’m challenged and I feel so useful. The schedule thing (for the actors and interns) I’m still working on.

**Grubbs:** I’m the union delegate for the dancers at Cincinnati Ballet. A lot of times it’s difficult to balance being a dancer in the company and being the contract enforcer/liaison between dancers and management. It involves quite a bit of creative thinking, and it definitely hones my problem-solving abilities on a daily basis.

**Question:** How do you navigate a life in the arts with a baby?

**Dubinski:** It takes a village! It’s actually not that difficult if Zack is in rehearsals. My rehearsals are usually at night. So we just don’t get to see each other very often!

Lynn Meyers (Ensemble producing artistic director) has been so gracious in letting me bring Quinn to the first hour or so of rehearsals and then Zack stops by ETC for the baby swap. (Grubbs on Meyers: “She’s awesome!”)

It gets really difficult when Zack's schedule with the ballet takes him into the theater. Then we're both working nights. We are really fortunate to know a few really great people in town who are willing to help us out. And my parents just moved to Glendale from New Jersey, so they are having lots of quality Quinn-time in December while we're both in production. It would not be possible without friends and family to help. They don't really have evening day cares!

**Question:** What are your favorite holiday traditions?

**Dubinski:** I'm from New Jersey and my dad's side of the family is Italian so one of my favorite things is the traditional fish dinner on Christmas Eve. It's delicious and I love visiting with family.

Also, as kids we always got to open one gift on Christmas Eve. I've had a hard time talking Zack into letting me continue that tradition. I'm sure Quinn will be in my camp soon.

**Grubbs:** The first one is Connie and I watch "White Christmas" while we put up the Christmas tree.

**Question:** What are you hoping Santa brings this year?

**Grubbs:** Two elves. One to clean up after the baby, our four cats, our dog, and the house in general ...

**Dubinski:** An army of cleaning elves. Our dog is 70 pounds. Add Quinn to the mix and there is always something to clean, sweep, wash, empty or pickup. The pet hair can be overwhelming and we have to vacuum at least every other day. Bring on the elves!

**Grubbs:** And one elf massage therapist to work out all of my aches and tightness so it doesn't take me 15 minutes to get out of bed in the morning.

**Question:** What are you listening to/reading/watching right now?

**Dubinski:** I'm currently re-reading George R. R. Martin's series "Song of Fire and Ice." The newest book just came out so I'm re-visiting those characters and that story.

Oh – now there's something I would want Santa to bring – the newest book in that series! I don't listen to a ton of music. NPR is always on in my car.

**Grubbs:** I'm reading a sci-fi fantasy series by Robert Jordan called "The Wheel of Time." I'm currently on book nine in the series of 14.

**Dubinski:** Zack and I record a few shows on TV. “Glee” is a favorite as well as “House” and “Law & Order – SVU,” since it's the last one standing ...

**Grubbs:** And “Up All Night”, and, of course NFL football. Go, Cowboys.

**Question:** What are you most looking forward to in the remaining shows of this season and why?

**Grubbs:** I'm most excited about the piece by Stacey Tookey we're performing in the March program. I really enjoyed working with her the week she was here to set the piece. Her choreography is amazing, and you feel a sense of accomplishment after running it.

**Question:** Where do we find you on date night?

**Dubinski:** Date night?

**Grubbs:** Oh, you must mean when Connie and I order takeout from Bonefish Grill, have a glass or two of wine, and watch a movie because Quinn decided to go to bed early.

**Dubinski:** That's about as “datey” as we get these days. If we do get a night out, we love seeing the Dancing Pigs play at Arnold's. Also, the Comet in Northside is a favorite haunt.

**Question:** What's your best baby story?

**Grubbs:** Quinn was two weeks old. It was 4 a.m., and I was on diaper duty. I was too tired to bring her to the changing table, so I decided to put a pad down and change her on the bed. Let's just say that I wasn't aware two-week-old babies could poop across the room onto the door. Connie thought it was hilarious. I didn't – until the next day.