



**Name:** Vincent and Valaura Jones (AKA Team VSquared)

**Tell us about yourself:** When we participated in Swinging with the Stars, we were newly engaged and the youngest ever couple to participate in the event's 9-year history (to that point). We were also the first, and possibly only, participants to do a tap number! We are passionate about giving back to our community, art and culture, music, travel, bad jokes, mid-century modern design and Manchester United.

In June 2018, we said our wedding vows on the stage of the Mary Irwin Theatre. Most days, you'll find us working together on By Jove Co., our branding and marketing business. We're also the embarrassingly proud parents of a neurotic cat named Kitty.

**What was your style of dance and why did you choose that one?** The theme in 2017 was "Famous movies/musicals," and as fans of classic Hollywood cinema, Valaura suggested we take on tap dance and Singin' in the Rain! I (Vince) decided to get my Gene Kelly on and go along for the ride. We came to Swinging with the Stars with no dance training whatsoever, yet decided to take on one of the most difficult and iconic numbers in film history... Why not?

We're big believers in what we call "enthusiastic participation" and do our best to "commit to the bit". Basically, if you have a chance to participate in something, always say "Yes!" and then do it with as much enthusiasm as you can muster.

For us, raising funds and awareness for COHA was a chance to support the mental wellbeing of those who are bereaved and to help those who are dying. So the risk of embarrassment and the long hours in rehearsal were well worth it.

Vince: It was definitely an ambitious undertaking, especially with my moves, but it was a challenge that we really leaned into, and with the help of Lucy Hazelwood of LUKI Dance Productions, and many hours spent tapping, we managed to surprise ourselves and perform our own special version of Singin' in the Rain. It was a really rewarding experience for a great cause! As an added bonus, we got to watch lots of Gene Kelly musicals in the name of research.

Valaura: To be perfectly honest, I'm not very flexible and I thought tap dance would be easier because it requires less bending! Oh, how naive I was! As it happens, tap dance requires near-perfect synchronization with your partner and there is nowhere to hide if you mess up... Not only can everyone see you, but they can hear you too. When you tap dance, you become an instrument and part of the song, which means everyone will know if you hit a bum note. But I would do it all again in a flash. I think I'm a tap dancer for life now, even if it's just when I'm waiting in line at the grocery store.

**How did you first learn about Swinging with the Stars?** Swinging with the Stars has been on our radar for many years. We have had lots of friends participate and were thrilled and humbled to be a part of Swinging with the Stars 2017. We really believe in the work that the Central Okanagan Hospice Association does!



**What was your connection to COHA at that time?** We didn't have a direct connection to COHA at the time of our participation in Swinging with the Stars, but we have always had huge appreciation for the supports that COHA provides.

Vince: Back in my native UK, I spent many hours in hospice, visiting family who were receiving end of life care. My nana, Alice, was a particularly powerful figure in my life and I saw first-hand the profound impact that quality hospice care can have in a loved one's final days.

Valaura: I've been very fortunate in that I haven't lost too many people in my life yet. But I also know that it is inevitable. It was really important to me to help spread the word about COHA's grief support programs because a loved one passing goes on long after the day. I dread the day when I feel that pain, but I'm comforted by the knowledge that COHA is there.

**What is your favourite memory from your performance?** Vince: When I think back to our performance, I think my favourite memory is the feeling of genuine satisfaction I got as we tapped across the stage. Satisfaction from supporting a great cause, and embarking on something genuinely challenging and fun with my partner. It was also wonderful to see so many friendly and familiar faces in the audience cheering us on. I was also relieved that I didn't fall on my face. I wish we could do it all over again!

Valaura: My grandparents are two of my most beloved people and best friends. They were able to be with us for our performance and I think we were able to make them proud that night, which is what I wanted more than anything. Who would have guessed that nearing my thirtieth decade, my Nana and Papa would be coming to my dance recital!

I'm also so grateful that I got to share this experience with my partner. Some would say that it's a lot of hard work but, even on the days when I was a crying mess, it was never work. I had my best friend with me.

**Are you still dancing today?** Yes and no... We haven't dusted off our tap shoes in quite a while but we would like to get back at it again. You can often find us tap dancing in the grocery store or mall. We can still remember most of our routine!

**What backstage moments stand out to you today?** There are a couple of moments that stick out from backstage... First was the great sense of camaraderie and community as we watched our fellow dancers don their costumes and show off their moves in support of COHA. We know everyone worked ever so hard, and it was great to see it all come together on the night!

Vince: I remember it being seconds before we were to walk onto the stage. Valaura and I were entering from different sides as part of our routine, and moments before we're about to go on, she comes running down the hall concerned about a step sequence. We'd done this thousands of times, so we quickly confirmed it, and then got our game face back on. In a way, it was a confidence booster before we stepped out, as it confirmed to us both that we'd put in the practice and had the routine under control.



Valaura: I don't get nervous very often, so when I forgot my steps I panicked! Thankfully, Vince was able to talk me through it in about 3 seconds and I think we both felt just totally calm and excited after that. When we hit the dance floor, my performer brain kicked in and it was all as natural as breathing. "We got this!"

One of my other favourite memories was whispering to Maria Grazianno that they'd called her name for Judge's Choice. She was so stunned and I'm not sure if it had fully registered!

**Has this experience inspired you to do other life changing things?** Vince: Well, I did get a tattoo to commemorate the experience, so you could call that life-changing! We're both pretty open to new experiences and I have a rule that fear or nerves is not a good enough reason to turn down the opportunity to do something interesting, and our experience with Swinging with the Stars has only reinforced that. It was such a worthwhile experience—from learning a new skill to raising funds for an amazing cause!

Valaura: In a way, Swinging with the Stars helped to inspire our entire wedding. We were beginning to ramp up planning while in the midst of rehearsals and we were so inspired by Gene Kelly musicals that the "theme" became MGM movie musical meets Palm Springs mid-century modern. That sounds crazy, but it was absolutely the perfect representation of us.

Debbie Reynolds once said that, "Singin' in the Rain and childbirth were the two hardest things I ever had to do in my life." I'll take a pass on the childbirth bit, but I can confirm that Singin' in the Rain was one of the hardest things I've ever done. And so there's not much that seems unachievable or overwhelming now!

**Is there anything else you'd like to share?** We'd like to extend some big thank yous to all the volunteers and staff who help to make COHA's programming a reality, to all the donors in the community who support the organization, to our fellow dancers for being willing to bust a move for a great cause and to all those who supported us during our participation, including Lucy Hazelwood of LUKI Dance Productions and Ami Catriona.