

A photograph of two fire dancers performing. They are holding long wooden sticks with large, glowing, mushroom-shaped flames at the ends. The flames are bright yellow and orange, contrasting sharply with the dark background. The dancers are positioned at the bottom of the frame, looking upwards at their flames. The dancer on the left is shirtless, while the one on the right wears a dark t-shirt and striped arm warmers. The overall scene is dramatic and high-contrast.

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Portfolio

written and photographed by SIMONE PADDOCK

Performing almost every Friday night at the plaza at Mirror Pond, Fyreflyte dazzles audiences with its searing free street performances. The fire dancers spin burning objects to the beat of tribal drum beats, much like the 18th-century Maori traditions. Most modern fire dancing was influenced by New Zealand's Maori and later Samoan traditions.



"It's really hard to define exactly what we are," said Michael Reusse, the unofficial leader of Fyreflyte. "I can't say we're a dance troupe or a fire troupe, because we also do black-light performances indoors, walk around on stilts and do acrobatics. We're really a performing arts group with its main expression being fire."



The dancers use Maori "poi" balls (a pair of chains with handles on one end and a bundle of wicking material on the other), wooden or metal staffs, hoops, fans and palm torches.



"I went to Thailand a few times over the last few years, saw the fire dancers there and finally said to myself, 'I have to do that,'" Reusse said. "But when I came home, I decided if I was going to do it, I wanted to do it in public and not just sit in my yard and spin.

Reusse met Rebecca Roth, Ian Douglas, Kelly Gouldson, Steve Pool and Erika Kightlinger—and Fyreflyte was born.

As effortless, passionate and graceful as Fyreflyte's performances may seem to the weekend spectator, there is a physical price to be paid by its members. Some of the troupe has received bruises, black eyes and broken noses from spinning staffs and poi.





"I came upon the Fyreflyte performance by chance, downtown one night. The spinning fire made it a very visceral experience, and everyone around me was either gaping in wonder or just smiling." -Cindy Tosio, Bend resident.

Training is a constant element for the troupe, especially since it has started to incorporate more choreography into its performances. "There is almost always a staff or a set of poi in the back of my car, so I just spin as much as I can," Reusse said.



