

## When Irish toes are tapping

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For many, appreciation of Celtic music begins and ends with green beer on St. Patrick's Day (March 17), but Lily Wood's toes tap to the rhythms of Irish fiddles and treble jigs all year long.



Sophomore Lily Wood leaps during a rehearsal for her trip to Boston on March 29 for the World Irish Dancing Championship. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The Tulane University sophomore from Portland, Ore., is currently prepping for the 43rd Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne, otherwise known as the World Irish Dancing Championship, to be held in Boston on March 29. She qualified for what will be her third appearance on the sport's highest stage by virtue of a 7th-place finish at the Southern Region Oireachtas, held in December at the New Orleans Convention Center.

As a 7 year old, Wood was entranced by Michael Flatley and Jean Butler's Riverdance performances. She joined the Comerford School of Irish Dance and quickly moved up the competitive ranks to championship level by the time she was 12. She qualified for her first Worlds at age 14, but not again until she was a high school senior.

"That's when I realized I had to practice more," she said. "You can't just have fun

with it and expect to place.”

The necessity of single-minded focus made Wood hesitant to pursue dance in college. But she struggled to walk away from the sport, and at the urging of her hometown instructor, joined the Muggivan School of Irish Dance in Metairie, La. After falling ill right before Oireachtas during her first year at Tulane, she took only 12 credits this past fall to concentrate on training.

Wood, who is pursuing a double major in cell and molecular biology as well as dance, views the upcoming championship as the twilight of her dance career, as she wants to focus on academics. A grant from [Newcomb-Tulane College](#) will help fund her trip, and she will represent her adopted city with a Mardi Gras-themed dress.

“It's probably going to be bittersweet, but it feels like the right way to end it.”

*Johanna Gretschel received a bachelor's degree with an English major from Tulane in 2012, and she is in the master's degree program.*