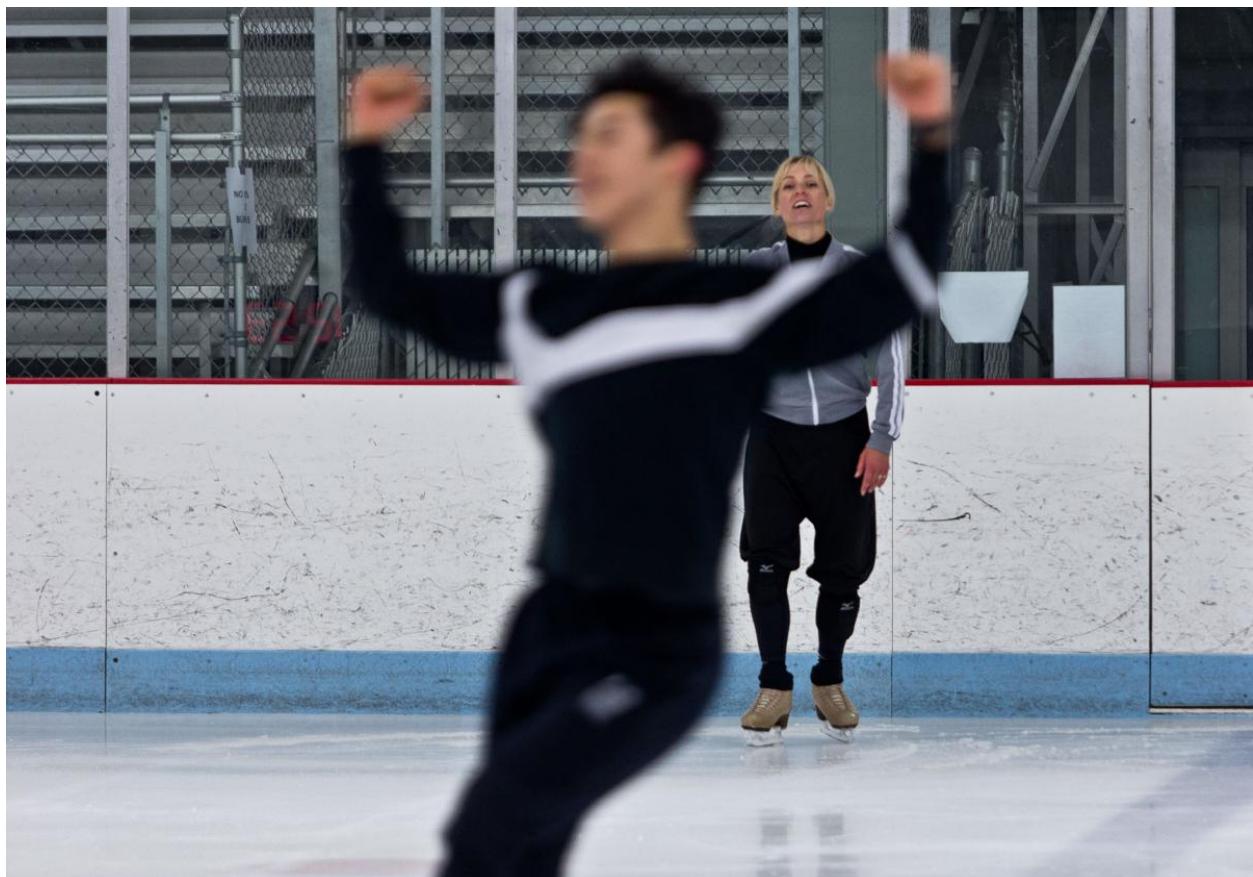


Canadian Olympian Shae-Lynn Bourne has made Charleston Center of figure skating world

By Andrew Miller apmiller@postandcourier.com



Choreographer Shae-Lynn Bourne watches Nathan Chen run through his short program during a practice on June 13, 2019, at the Carolina Ice Palace. Bourne has been working with the two-time world champion for the past three years and coaches other world-class figure skaters. Sylvia Jarrus/Staff

They come to Charleston from halfway around the world, from as far away as Japan and Korea, to spend a few days with Shae-Lynn Bourne. Bourne, the former Canadian

Olympian ice dancer, has become the hottest choreographer in figure skating. Bourne's list of clients reads like a virtual who's who of the figure skating world. Defending world champion Nathan Chen flew in from his home in California last month to work with Bourne on his short program at the Carolina Ice Palace for the upcoming season. Evgenia Medvedeva, a silver medalist at the 2018 Winter Olympics and a two-time world champion, will be in the Lowcountry to work with Bourne later this summer.

Mariah Bell, Vincent Zhou, and French pair Vanessa James and Morgan Cipres will be visiting in the next few weeks. So how did Charleston and the Carolina Ice Palace in North Charleston suddenly become the center of the figure skating world? Almost by pure happenstance. Bourne was living in Toronto when she was looking to escape the cold Canadian winters. In 2010, she purchased a home on Pawleys Island and spent parts of the year on the South Carolina coast. In 2012, she married Bohdan Turok and the couple spent their honeymoon on Pawleys.

The newlyweds made the hour drive down U.S. Highway 17 to Charleston on a day trip and fell in love with the city. They bought a condominium on James Island two years later and moved to Charleston full time in February. "We wanted to be closer to the ocean, and I wanted to be as far away from the Toronto winters as I could get," Bourne, 43, said with a laugh. "We love to experience new parts of the world, and the pace of life here in Charleston is so much different than in Toronto."

There's something more natural about Charleston, a slower pace, and more time to be creative." The thought of becoming a choreographer to the stars of figure skating evolved over time. As a competitor, Bourne won a world ice dancing title with Victor Kraatz in 2003. When Kraatz decided to retire in 2005, Bourne was forced to become a solo skater. "I had to reinvent myself," Bourne said.

Bourne toured on the figure skating circuit for a number of years and still competed when she could. She began choreographing her own programs and quickly built a reputation as

an innovating force. Other performers began to take notice. “When they saw what I was doing with my solos, I started to get requests to help them out, and I was happy to do it,” Bourne said. It didn’t take long for Bourne to realize that choreography could be her future. “It wasn’t something I set out to do,” Bourne said.

“It kind of happened organically.” Canada’s Joannie Rochette, a 2010 Winter Olympics bronze medalist, was her first big-name client. “You pick up clients by word of mouth,” Bourne said. “The skaters would see what we were doing in some of the shows and they’d reach out to me. I think having Joannie as a client really got my name out there.” It wasn’t long before Bourne was working with the world’s top figure skaters. Yuzuru Hanyu, who won gold medals in the 2014 and 2018 Winter Olympics, became a client. “I really started to enjoy the process of being a choreographer,” Bourne said.

“It’s a new challenge every season and with every skater. I grew to love it. Once you have success with a skater from one country, the rest of the skaters from that country will start to reach out.” Bourne figures she has about 20 clients in all with Chen, the two-time defending world champ, at the top of the list.

“Shae is definitely one of the most creative choreographer that I’ve ever worked with,” said the 20-year-old Chen, who is a student at Yale. “She’s very modern and she brings an almost avant-garde feel to her choreography, which really appeals to me. Her choreography is very different from some of the more traditional programs, and that makes her stand out.” Chen said it’s the collaborative effort between himself and Bourne that has made the pair so successful. “At this point in my career, I know what I like and what feels good to me,” Chen said.

“Shae helps me bring out my authentic self on the ice and I think that’s really important.” Bourne and Chen have been collaborating for three years, and each year Bourne has tried to bring something different to his short programs. “Nathan is great. He’s not afraid to do something new, and that’s what I love about him,” Bourne said. “He’s open to suggestions. I suggested a piece of music for him for the Olympics, and I knew it wasn’t

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the safe choice, but he went with it. He was courageous enough and brave enough to try something new, and not a lot of skaters would have trusted me to go with it.”

The majority of Bourne’s clients have never been to Charleston and are surprised to find a top-notch ice skating facility at the Carolina Ice Palace. “I’m sure most of my clients probably don’t think Charleston even had an ice rink,” Bourne said. “We have a great facility. They have a friendly staff and that makes such a huge difference. They’ve always made me and my clients feel welcome.”

Bourne also makes sure her clients head downtown to get a feel for the city. “I always encourage them to go downtown and try out some of the restaurants so they can literally get a taste of the city,” Bourne said.