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Robert Gaitley Mathews and James Michael Stevenson celebrated their partnership yesterday at St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia in Manhattan. The Rev. Mitties DeChamplain, an Episcopal priest, performed the commitment ceremony.

Mr. Mathews (above, left), 44, is an independent acting coach in Manhattan, working primarily with singers. He received an associate's degree in business from Louisburg College in North Carolina, a bachelor's degree in English literature from Berea College in Kentucky and a master's degree in acting from Southern Methodist University. He is a son of the late Jean and James H. Mathews of Red Springs, N.C.

Mr. Stevenson, 55, is the head gardener at a private estate in Manhasset, N.Y. He graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio



and received a certificate in horticulture from the New York Botanical Garden School of Professional Horticulture in the Bronx. He is a son of Elizabeth and Wilbert N. Stevenson of Streator, Ill. Both Mr. Mathews and Mr. Stevenson have legally changed their surnames to Stevenson-Mathews.

They met in the spring of 2002 at a class for Scottish country dancing in Manhattan. Mr. Stevenson was accompanying the group of 70 dancers on piano; Mr. Mathews, who had recently moved to New

York from Dallas, attended because of his interest in Scottish culture. Mr. Mathews introduced himself to Mr. Stevenson after the class.

"I was drawn to him because of his talent, and I liked that he was understated about it," Mr. Mathews explained. "He wasn't boastful."

Because Mr. Stevenson played only occasionally for the class, it was several weeks before they saw each other again. But when they did they had a real conversation, and Mr.

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Stevenson found that he liked Mr. Mathews, too.

"I liked his outgoing personality," Mr. Stevenson said, "and the fact that people enjoyed being with him. I'm shy and not outgoing, so it's a good blend."

Mr. Stevenson offered Mr. Mathews a ride to a weekend dance workshop. It was not a date, both later said, but that first drive to the Berkshires turned out to be the beginning of a deep friendship. They went on other long car trips to weekend dance workshops, and in Manhattan they went out to plays, movies and restaurants.

"The focus at first was not dating, but the camaraderie of the dance community," Mr. Mathews said. "That focus didn't give us a chance to sabotage the relationship."

Then, in November 2002, they went to a Scottish ball together in West Point, N.Y.

Eventually the band provided a break from the Scottish music and struck up a waltz.

"There is a certain intimacy that only comes with the waltz," Mr. Mathews said. "And on that particular evening,



we waltzed together for the first time. It was a defining moment. As we danced together, there was a joy and comfort and a feeling that this is good."

They went on their first official date a week later.

"We just accidentally got to know each other," Mr. Mathews recalled. "And I think that's the thing that is going to carry us through."

