

Datestamp: 07/09/2007

Dancing like the stars

By Juliana Goodwin

News-Leader

Never mind that Dee Claiborne is a 4-foot, 11-inch 64-year-old woman.

She can tango and cha-cha with the best of them.

Inspired by the ABC show "Dancing with the Stars," Claiborne enrolled in ballroom dance classes at Sonshine Royal Ballroom nine months ago.

"You always want to dance in your head, thinking 'I would love to be able to do that,'" Claiborne said. "I'm a believer you have to get out of your comfort zone in order to grow."

Ballroom dancing is sizzling in dance studios across the country and the Ozarks. The trend has been propelled by shows such as "So You Think you Can Dance." Once viewers get off the couch and into dance studios, they discover the benefits of dance.

"It's hot with all ages," said Don McCarty, who owns Sonshine Royal Ballroom. "Before it used to only be adults; I have 6 years old all the way up to 80."

It's a good thing to know when you're 15.

You know; for the ladies.

Shane Thompson smiles and nods when asked if girls are impressed he can ballroom dance.

There's been a surge in interest among people his age.

"I think it brought more people who are younger, like teens, but it also brought more people to dancing," Thompson said.

Ballroom

For the past year, Debbie Clause, owner of Springfield School of Dance, has received several calls a week inquiring about ballroom dancing.

"They just want to learn to dance like 'Dancing with the Stars,'" Clause said. "Unfortunately, I don't teach that type of dance. I teach children, ballet, tap, jazz."

After 32 years in business, she has seen this swell of interest twice before, once when the disco craze hit and then when swing dancing swept the nation. Both times she added classes to meet the demand and is toying with the idea of adding ballroom dancing.

Clause will attend two conferences this summer to learn more about ballroom dancing.

The trend is to be expected, said Kelly Frey, who owns Step by Step dance studio.

People call her and say they want to learn ballroom dancing, but they don't know what that encompasses.

"There is a whole genre that falls under those: foxtrot, rumba, cha-cha, waltz, tango," Frey said.

Under that umbrella, the tango has been requested the most.

"They like the flair, the attitude which they have seen on (television). The waltz is a timeless dance. It never loses its appeal for couples," Frey said.

Tim Dougherty, 34, and his wife began taking private lessons with Frey five months ago.

It's something they've always wanted to do, and have discovered it's great exercise.

"It's excellent. Especially the Latin stuff; you don't stop moving. I have to admit with the salsa we were sore in our hips," said Dougherty.

Doug Bloch, 58, and his wife finally found time to fulfill their interest in dance.

They've been enrolled in classes with Frey since April 2006.

"It's something we both enjoy doing. We spend time together. The physical challenge. Then it gives us an opportunity to socialize," Bloch said.

Claiborne had reservations at first, but said it's been a blast.

"My fear was I would come across a tall, snooty person in a tuxedo," she said. It didn't happen. "We laugh a lot. It was a good way to meet people. I have met some really nice folks."

She's become so "addicted" she's in a different class nearly every day.

The grandmother likes the fact she's exercising without the stress of exercising. She joined a women's gym at one point, but it wasn't for her.

"Those women were so serious about firming up. Oh, please, not at this stage in my life. I just want to tone up a bit," Claiborne said.

Dance trends are nothing new.

When The Gap swing commercial aired years ago, swing requests went crazy, McCarty said.

He had to offer nine swing classes a week just to keep up.

"Back in 'Urban Cowboy' days, country-western was at its peak. Every time there's a movie that comes out with dance in it, the dance business booms," McCarty said.

He's enjoying the ride because trends are fleeting.

The dance business is like a roller coaster, he said. One moment classes are flooded and the next it's like "where did everybody go?" McCarty said.

Want to learn?

– Sonshine Performing Arts Academy, 1329 E. Republic Road Suite C, Springfield. Call 883–3102 or go to www.sonshinedance.com

– Step By Step Dance Studio, 1722 S. Glenstone Ave., Suite G. Call 877–7837 or go to www.dancestepbystep.com

– Ballroom World, 1911 S. Glenstone Ave. Call 889–0300 or go to www.theballroomworld.com

Origins of common ballroom dances

Tango: is a social dance originating in low-class areas of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Today, there are many tango dance styles, including Argentine tango, Uruguayan tango, Ballroom tango (American and international styles), Finnish tango, Chinese tango, and vintage tangos. The Argentine tango is often regarded as the "authentic" tango because it is closest to that originally danced in Argentina and Uruguay, though other types of tango have developed into mature dances in their own right.

Waltz: romantic dance in moderate triple time. It evolved from the German Ländler and became popular in the 18th century. The dance is smooth, graceful and vital in performance. The waltz was introduced in the United States via England in the early 19th century.

The foxtrot: The foxtrot is a ballroom dance that takes its name from its inventor, the vaudeville actor Harry Fox. According to legend, Fox was unable to find female dancers capable of performing the more difficult two-step. As a result, he added stagger steps (two trots), creating the basic Foxtrot rhythm of slow-slow-quick-quick. The dance premiered in 1914. It was originally danced to ragtime. Today, it's accompanied by the same big band music to which swing is also danced. Over time, Foxtrot split into slow and quick (Quickstep) versions.

Cha-cha-cha: Also known as the cha-cha, this is a style of dance music. In 1951, Cuban composer and violinist Enrique Jorrín introduced the cha-cha-chá to Cuban dance floors while playing with Orquesta América. According to Jorrín, the sound made by the shoes of the dancers on the floor sounded like "cha-cha-cha."

Rumba: Rumba is a family of music rhythms and dance styles that originated in Africa and were introduced to Cuba and the New World by African slaves. It became popular as a ballroom dance in the U.S. and Europe in the 1930s. It has a distinctive rhythm, often played on maracas or bongos.

Samba: A Brazilian dance that existed in various rural and urban forms, always accompanied by singing, before it was taken up as a ballroom dance in the 1930s. Lively, syncopated rhythms are a dominant feature.

Source: www.reference.com, www.encyclopedia.com