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## **Get into the swing of dance**

By Tresa McBee

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So you're not Gene Kelly singin' in the rain, and you're unlikely to trip any light fantastic without tripping over someone – or thing – first.

Doesn't matter. You can still learn to ballroom dance and enjoy it. A lot.

"The desire is the biggest thing," says Kelly Frey, owner of Step by Step Dance Studio on South Glenstone Avenue.

She should know. Frey arrived at dance as an adult. Her interest was sparked only seven years ago; she opened her studio in 2002.

"It's the very thing that gives me the passion to teach ... and what it's like to learn something that's not natural to you. ...

"It was awkward at first," Frey admits. "I didn't know how to carry my frame. I didn't know how to move my weight from one foot to another."

Learning to dance is like learning a language, she says. "You learn the alphabet, and then you can put that into words ... and eventually it forms a story."

Ballroom dancing is a low-impact exercise you can participate in with or without a partner in private or group lessons around the Ozarks.

Taking steps – all pun intended – to get started can be intimidating. But don't let the fear of looking foolish hold you back, says professional dancer Nicole "Nikki" Main, who's a visiting teacher for the summer at Frey's studio.

"Pick up the phone. That's probably the hardest thing to do. ... The second-hardest thing is probably walking through the door."

And, please, resist the urge to turn right back around.

"I've had to chase people who've walked in and left," says Main, who previously taught in Las Vegas. "If you can walk, you can dance. Dancing is walking to music."

Instructors usually offer group and private lessons. Pick your preference based on your goals, Frey suggests. Are you learning for a wedding, or do you want to take up dance as a regular activity?

Her group lessons are structured – same time, same day – while private lessons can be flexible based on students' schedules, although they are more expensive.

In this area, Frey says, group lessons run about \$10 an hour (or less for packages), and private tutoring averages between \$40 and \$60.

There is value to each kind, Main says.

"People will progress faster in private lessons. It's a good way to go if they feel embarrassed in front of a group. It depends on what they're in for. If they want to meet people, a group is the way to go."

Main adds: "Private lessons don't mean you want to compete. Private lessons mean you want to get better."

The first time Kim Lewis walked into a line dancing class, she took her money and ran. Frey called and persuaded Lewis to return.

She's glad she did.

"It's a lot of good, fun exercise. I needed to lose 40 pounds, and I did."

Physical limitations needn't prevent people from dancing, Frey says. It's low-impact exercise that can be a lifelong activity.

For Michael Wardell, dance was a way out of chronic pain.

The former U.S. Marine was medically discharged after almost 20 years because of a spinal injury. Three surgeries hadn't helped, and Wardell's 185-pound frame ballooned to 225 pounds. Most activities were impossible – even swimming – and he had given up. His sedentary life punctuated by pain was depressing.

Through meeting Main – who's now his girlfriend – Wardell began dancing and competes at the amateur level. His pain is virtually gone, and he's back down to a trim 195 – give or take a few pounds.

"Just getting out on the dance floor was probably the hardest thing. ... Next thing I know, the weight is just falling off me," Wardell says.

Most instructors will start with a smooth dance like a waltz or fox trot.

"It's very easy to keep the timing and hear the music," says Alex Patsioukov of Ballroom World in the Plaza Tower Center on South Glenstone Avenue. His first private lesson is free so people can check dance out.

Next are rhythm dances like the rumba, cha-cha and salsa, where timing is a little more complicated, he says.

Beginning with smooth dances teaches people how to partner, hold their frames and how to lead and follow, Frey says.

"The guys are always happy to know when they walk into my studio that they are in charge," she says, laughing.

But don't get too excited, gentlemen. Couples' dancing is a partnership, regardless of the steps.

"It requires 50 percent of lead and 50 percent of follow," says Patsioukov, a native of Russia. "If one pushes more and one's resisting, it doesn't work."

Don't have a partner? No problem. Line dancing doesn't require one. If you want to learn couples' dancing, there's always someone willing to step in, Frey says.

Bari Precious attended one of Frey's recent ballroom classes by herself and partnered with a man who came by himself.

"Dancing offers that very essential part of touch. We want to move, to be touched, but in a nonthreatening way," Precious says. "It's a social situation. Everyone's fumbling around. You're not the only one."

She's taking a cruise in August and wants to know how to dance.

"Anybody can do it," Precious says.

Next up: intermediate ballroom lessons.

### **Dress for dance**

Comfort is key for both dress and shoes in a dance class.

Kelly Frey, owner of Step by Step Dance Studio on South Glenstone Avenue, prefers clothes that allow dancers to see how their bodies are aligned. And think cool. You'll get warm.

Shoes must glide, not slide, says Alex Patsioukov, owner of Ballroom World, also on South Glenstone Avenue.

Leather is too slick, and rubber will stick. Suede is best, he says.

"It gives you good connection to the floor, and of course, they're very comfortable. You can spend \$40 to \$300."

Another reason to pay attention to footwear: the floor.

"You have to have respect for the dance floor," Patsioukov says.

Dance works the entire body, Frey says, including the feet. Guys should steer clear of sandals and sneakers, and girls should look for a low heel. Stay away from sling-back shoes.

"They need a shoe that has a smooth sole and one that's fully attached to the foot," Frey says. "We're working with feet, and you need to be able to feel your feet."

Here are a few places to take dance lessons. Check the phone book for more.

\* Starlighters School of Dance in Nixa at 724-8878

\* Step by Step Dance Studio in Springfield at 877-7837 or [www.dancestepbystep.com](http://www.dancestepbystep.com)

\* Sunshine Royal Ballroom in Republic at 883-3269

\* Ballroom World in Springfield at 889-0300

\* Princess Ballroom at 889-9832