

Steppin' out

Dancers get in swing of things

By Janice Brunson
and Diane Gale
staff writers

So you think you want to learn how to dance. You're in good company.

Ballroom dance teachers in metropolitan Detroit say they are seeing increasing numbers of younger people in their classes. Where ballroom dancing once appealed only to the older set, films such as "Saturday Night Fever" and "Urban Cowboy," and the Broadway revue, "Tango Argentino," are spreading its appeal across generation lines.

Jack Henley of Redford Township wrote the book on ballroom dancing. Really. It's called, "Dancers Delight: Learn the Latest Steps. It's Fun. It's Easy."

Henley and his wife, Eleanor, teach ballroom dancing, or as Henley prefers to call it, social dancing, for Livonia Public Schools adult education program.

And once a year they share the techniques of "touch dancing" with Livonia Stevenson High School students preparing for the prom.

INTEREST in ballroom dancing usually rises and falls in cycles, Henley said.

"There's been an explosion in the last 10 years in ballroom dancing," said Henley, who began his dancing career in 1944, when he signed up to become an Arthur Murray dance instructor.

Knowing how to dance the fox trot, swing, hustle and a bit of waltz is the ideal combination for most social purposes, area dancing teachers such as the Henleys, Annette Mac and Suzanne Gordon say.

And as few as three lessons can give most students enough skill to "cut the rug" in public.

ANNETTE MAC has taught dancing for nearly 30 years, primarily to groups who enroll in classes through community education.

Suzanne Gordon has been teaching dancing for 23 years, the last eight of which she has spent managing an Arthur Murray Dance Studio. She gives both group and private lessons.



photos by ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

The Grande Ballroom in Westland offers big-band dancing every Tuesday and Sunday night. Here Garden City residents Susie Pepera and Daniel Showalter, both 19, step out . . .

Top dances

The dances to know, instructors say, are:

Fox trot



America's slow dance, performed to 1940s big band sounds that have emerged anew in popularity, or to current hits that are sweet, slow and dreamy.

Swing



A fast dance that is a modernized and simplified version of the 1940s jitterbug. Swing became popular again following release of the film, "Urban Cowboy," in the early 1980s.

Hustle



The hustle is disco, a dance form that combines the sensuality of slow dancing with the undulation of swing. It emerged in the 1970s. It is credited by dance teachers with renewing interest in ballroom dancing after an era of "instinctive" dancing in which participants gyrated at will to sounds of hard rock.

Waltz



The waltz, traditional and lovely. Dance instructors agree it is a basic requirement for marriage, as important as a wedding ring or vows.

Polka



An ethnic dance that, when performed properly, is smooth. "If you're bumping into people on the dance floor, you need lessons," Mac said.



. . . step lively . . .

Dance spots

Several area clubs offer ballroom dancing nights for those yearning to step out.

The Grande Ballroom, Merriman and Warren roads in Westland, offers ballroom dancing Sundays and Tuesdays.

"We even have situations where grandparents, children and grandchildren come down together," said owner Rob Cortis.

Jamie's on 7 offers big band music on Mondays featuring Johnny Trudell.

"Johnny draws everyone from 21 to 60," said owner Jamie Coe. "There's more and more young people" coming out for Trudell's show, he said. The night spot is on Seven Mile west of Middlebelt in Livonia.

MAXIES, 14060 Telegraph in Redford Township, recently began offering ballroom dancing on Wednesdays. Doors open at 7 p.m.

Bonnie Brook Country Club, on Telegraph south of Eight Mile in Detroit, offers ballroom dancing on Sundays from 9 p.m. to midnight during the summer.

"Dancers Delight: Learn the lat-

est steps, It's Fun - It's Easy," written by Jack Henley, a Redford resident, outlines other places ballroom dancing is commonly found. They include YMCA's and YWCA's, church organizations, dinner dance clubs, senior citizen centers, singles clubs, dance studios, country clubs, ethnic centers, community recreation centers, private clubs and adult education leisure time programs.

IF YOU DON'T want to leave your house to enjoy the big band sound, turn on a radio. Dave Shafer, programming director for CKLW (800 AM and 94 FM), says his audience is mostly older, but the number of younger listeners is growing.

"The AM station plays hits from the '40s, '50s, '60s and '70s. Listeners 25 to 35 make up 10 percent of the audience. That's not a lot, he said, but more than in the past.

"During the last year, there's more younger people," Shafer said. "They were never exposed to it before, and they're finding it and saying 'I like it.'"

— Diane Gale

A timeless appeal

By Diane Gale
staff writer

Step aside, funky chicken. Make room for the swing and cha-cha. You don't have to be collecting Social Security to admire the grace and style of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers gliding across a ballroom floor.

In fact, local entertainers report more and more young people are sidestepping rock and roll and New Wave — at least now and then — to "trip the light fantastic."

Dancing to Glenn Miller and other orchestras from the '40s and '50s has a different kind of attraction: It's romantic, energetic and to 19-year-old Susan Pepera, "it's special."

"Rock and roll you can get any time," the Garden City big band enthusiast said.

"It's fun because there's so much of the New Wave and rock and roll that it gets boring for me. The dancing isn't crazy."

"Some of the dancing today is outrageous and can be offensive. Big band is more relaxed, and at the same time it's got a steady rhythm that never lets down."

PEPERA WAS drawn to the music by her parents, who played albums from a generation ago to their nine children.

"You see these people on the album cover that look to be 30 years old, and you hear the music and it's so energetic that it's fantastic."

"It helped me get a different perspective in music, because I was so involved in rock and roll — when the big band music would come on it would be extra special."

PEPERA KNOWS her music.

The articulate college sophomore is a disc jockey at Dearborn's Henry Ford Community College radio station, WHFR 89.3, where her bubbly personality vibrates the airwaves. The studio hides her flashing green eyes, deep dimples and long red hair.

Pepera says the big band programs generate a good response from students.

"I've acquired a lot of friends through big band music," she said. "I'll be playing a song and they'll stop in to talk to it."

"Five years ago I wouldn't have believed I would be going to big band concerts."

The dances to know, instructors say, are:

● Fox trot, America's slow dance, performed to 1940s big band sounds that have emerged anew in popularity, or to current hits that are sweet, slow and dreamy.

● Swing, a fast dance that is a modernized and simplified version of the 1940s jitterbug. Swing became popular again following release of the film, "Urban Cowboy," in the early 1980s.

● Hustle is disco, a dance form that combines the sensuality of slow dancing with the undulation of swing. It emerged in the 1970s. It is credited by dance teachers with renewing interest in ballroom dancing after an era of "instinctive" dancing in which participants gyrated at will to sounds of hard rock.

● Waltz, traditional and lovely. Dance instructors agree it is a basic requirement for marriage, as important as a wedding ring or vows.

● Polka, an ethnic dance that, when performed properly, is smooth. "If you're bumping into people on the dance floor, you need lessons," Mac said.

"MANY OF MY students are couples about to be married or their parents. They suddenly realize the wedding is coming up and they don't know how to waltz," Mac said.

But, she adds, the waltz does not justify "much time" in lessons because it is rarely danced elsewhere other than weddings.

People who go into a class shy and nervous come out "so popular," because they're confident and know what they're doing, Henley said.

"It's the greatest enjoyment and a beautiful way to spend the evening," Eleanor said.

MAC TEACHES ballroom dancing some five nights a week, usually at schools such as Clarenceville Junior High School in Livonia or at community centers like the 10 Mile Community Center in Farmington.

Courses normally consist of eight classes each, one night a week for eight weeks.

The course costs around \$25, Mac said. When asked, she will scale a course down to three lessons.

"I encourage students to go out dancing in public after the second lesson," she said. "It's great practice."

How long does it take to learn to dance well? Mac answers with a question of her own, "How good do you want to be?"

THE ARTHUR MURRAY Studio in Royal Oak is currently offering a special — three private lessons and two group lessons for \$25, studio manager Gordon said.

Evening lessons at Arthur Murray's resemble an evening out on the town. Electricity is in the air and students are dressed accordingly, women in heels and men in jackets.

Unlike Mac, who accepts only couples, Arthur Murray studios encourage singles.

"If we end up with more men than women or vice versa, we just change partners more often," Gordon said.

Students ranging in age from 18 to 80 use dance lessons at Arthur Murray to meet others. The studio regularly schedules social evenings where new steps can be practiced in purely social settings.

"In the last eight to 10 years there's been a lot more younger people," Gordon said. "People are realizing they have to learn how to dance and they can't just go on the dance floor and jump around anymore."

ONE RECENT Sunday, Vern Fath, 30, spun across the dance floor at the Grande Ballroom in Westland with his dancing partner, Marlin Mackovjak, 25. Both live in Ann Arbor. You never would have guessed three years ago he'd never danced before.

"It's addicting," Mackovjak said.

Fath said: "I like to dance slow. It's a form of dancing that the other person has to know what they're doing. It's a partnership."

Don Korte, a Canton farmer, is leader of the Don Korte Orchestra, which entertains mostly at dinner dances in the metro Detroit area. Korte has seen a change in the crowds he draws.

"In the places we've played there's always a mix of high school and college-age people," he said.

He attributes the growing popularity among the under-50 crowd to exposure during high school. Some 20 years ago, big band orchestra leaders toured schools to give students a taste of the music and to try and drum up business, he said.

"It's such a nice form of music, and it's such a shame people don't get to hear it as much," Korte said. "It's music that swings and it's a pleasure to listen to. It almost makes you want to keep rhythm and dance."

ELDON MAIRWEDE, a Bloomfield Hills resident and member of the Puttin' on the Ritz 17-piece orchestra, emphasizes the need to draw a difference between the big band sound played by smaller groups and the actual big band music.

Most of his group's engagements are with country clubs and yacht clubs. More recently they have been hired for weddings.

Paying a large number of musicians can be expensive, Mairwede said.

"We have to charge up to \$2,000 an evening," he said. "Because of that expense you won't have very many places that can afford a big band."



. . . and trip the light fantastic to the swinging '40s sound.