

Burn from page E1

turns, added Nader. "We need to be participators. We need to be a part of what's going on, and not just visually," she said. "Plus, we're more health-conscious. We need other ways to work out our calories and our feelings, and dancing is a nice, safe way to express yourself."

And, while more couples and individuals are taking up or rediscovering ballroom dancing, the 44 professional dancers who perform in *Burn The Floor* are offering audiences an opportunity to see the tango, cha cha, waltz, lindy hop and six other ballroom styles at their technical best.

The performers, some of the world's top ballroom champions, are the "black belts" of the form, said Clark, who has scheduled a *Burn The Floor* field trip for instructors and more than 40 of his studio's students, from beginners to competition-level dancers.

The show promises a high level of technical and athletic ability, but *Burn The Floor*, unlike ballroom competition, isn't bound by rules or, for that matter, image. *Burn The Floor* showcases a group of top-notch professionals "pretty much doing what they do best and just going all out ... kind of like *Riverdance* but with ballroom," said Clark.

Traditions and new twists
Inspired by a crowd-pleasing ballroom performance at Elton John's 50th-birthday party, *Burn The Floor* appropriately skirts the rules in favor of energetic theatricality, invention and individuality.
"It's anything but about rules," said Jason Gilkison, a member of

That ballroom dance is being presented as theater for the stage and public performance is evidence of its transformation.

the cast and the show's artistic director. "This will change people's perspective on what ballroom dancing is."

Created by Harley Medcalf, promoter of *Lord of the Dance*, the show not only takes audiences on a journey through the world of ballroom dancing but also puts a new spin on several dance styles. "We take a dance like the cha cha cha, and put the dancers in street clothes and Dock Martens, and then the nature of the dance starts to change," said Gilkison.

Likewise, the show begins with a traditional rendition of the waltz. "With the innocence between men and women, the man gently leading the woman, and the woman never looking at the man," Gilkison said. "At the end of that, one of the dancers rips his tuxedo off - the man sort of sheds off the mask of the old ballroom to reveal the opposite of that innocence."

A form evolving
The show's opening metaphor is an appropriate one, given ballroom's recent growth and continuing evolution.

That ballroom dance is being presented as theater for the stage and public performance is evidence of its transformation. More importantly, technique levels are higher than in years past, and athleticism is playing a significant role in today's ballroom competitions.

Some have even dubbed competition-level ballroom "dance sport." Once more, there's a push to bring ballroom competition to the Olympics.

"Most people think of ballroom dancing and think of Lawrence Welk and the bubble machine. Ballroom dancing today is far more energetic and it's enthusiastic and very physical. It's really a new generation of dancing," said Clark.

Ballroom training has also become much more sophisticated, said Nader, who was trained at one of Detroit's first Arthur Murray dance studios in the late '40s. Likewise, interpretation of the form and specific styles has become more of an art form, she said.

Even ballroom's most basic principles - male leading woman - may gradually undergo transformation, Nader added, recalling a recent class in which a young male student asked her why he had to lead when his partner had better timing. "And, that was true," said Nader. "But tradition says the guys are supposed to lead. I think it may be whoever is the stronger of the two that will be the leader."

Partnership
One thing that will never come under siege in ballroom dancing is partnership. "That's what ballroom is about," said Gilkison. Take away partnership, two dancers engaged in a dialogue

and working together to express themselves, and ballroom, by definition, becomes freestyle dance.

And, partnership is perhaps what makes *Burn The Floor* so accessible to audiences. "The audience identifies with relationships in their own life," said Gilkison. "And, it's not just happy all the time. We look at all aspects of life."

Off the stage and in the dance studio, partnership is a learning experience, Nader said of ballroom's appeal. While younger generations are discovering the form, they're also just learning that "someone has to lead and someone has to follow," she said. "I see this all the time ... a little power play. He can only be as good as I let him. Then, a give-and-take, the considerations in life, the respect in life, the helping of each other."



Physical flirtations: *Burn The Floor*, a marathon of ballroom dancing, churns out lusty renditions of such dances as the tango, salsa and rumba.

Gilda from page E1

best friend, Alyce. She was already planning the event before we got off the phone."

Together, Miller and Fayo enlisted the help of other comedians to host an annual benefit for Gilda's Club. In 1997 these Motor City Women of Comedy enlisted the help of a few good men, too.

"Alyce had a real knack for making everything an event, she thrived on it," said Miller. "She made it a spectacular, elegant event. She made it happen. She was the ultimate hostess."

Miller also commented on Fayo's ability to motivate others. "When Rosie O'Donnell got her own show, Alyce and I sent her flowers to congratulate her. The card that said 'you go girl,' we signed it Motor City of Comedy. Alyce kept in touch with Rosie, and in 1998 when it was time to begin planning our benefit for Gilda's Club, she asked Rosie to make a donation. From watching the show, Alyce learned that Rosie had just lost a friend to cancer. You can imagine her excitement when Rosie sent a check for \$10,000.

"Alyce touched so many lives, and her laughter lives on. I miss

being able to see her perform because she was so talented. I was fortunate to be able to visit her when she was sick, just to help out. Even when she was tired from the treatments she would think of something to say to bring a smile to someone's face. She wanted everyone to feel good."

"I'm so thankful they're doing this (giving her the award). She's an inspiration to me."

Miller - who works as a comedian throughout the Midwest, including Ohio, and books comedians at various clubs and venues - will be attending the event.

Also being honored is the memory of Linda Kozlowski, who volunteered her time to Gilda's Club and the community before dying of breast cancer in 1996.

"Linda's mission was to bring the need for breast cancer awareness and education to the community's attention," said Lester. Kozlowski's mission continues in a fund called "Women Alive."

In honoring her memory, Kozlowski's husband, Dr. Jay Kozlowski, her mother, Evelyn

Kasle, and sister and brother-in-law, Lisa and Gary Shiffman, will serve as honorary chairpersons for *Gilda's Big Night Out II*. The event will feature a performance by comedian Jeffrey Ross, a silent auction, and a strolling supper.

"We have some lovely pieces of jewelry, car leases, sports memorabilia, tickets to baseball games - a wide variety of exciting items in different price ranges," said Lester about the auction."

Ross has appeared on *The Late Show* with David Letterman, *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno, and *Late Night* with Conan O'Brien. Comedy Central fans know Ross for his *Friar's Club* roasts and stand-up specials, *Pulp Comics* and *Lounge Lizards*.

He is currently writing and appearing on Comedy Central's *The Man Show*, and also stars in the Showtime original film *Karate Knight*. He will star in a cameo role in *The Rocky & Bullwinkle Movie*, starring Robert DeNiro and Renee Russo.

"Gilda's Club is a special place," said Lester. "We hope people will support us."

Wanna play?

AMERICAN

CRANBROOK INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

April Events!

Special Weekday Planetarium Programs

April 24-28
 Young Stargazers Sky Journey - 11:30am
 Planet Alignment 2000 - 12:30 & 3pm
 Laser Swing - 2 & 4pm

Weekend Planetarium programs, too! Admission to the Planetarium is extra.

Starry Nights INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

Fridays, 5-10pm
 The Institute remains open every Friday night until 10pm with astronomy and Laser programs in the Planetarium, at 7, 8 and 9pm, Observatory open until 10pm and Reflections Cafe open until 9pm.

Eco-Week

April 24-30, 11am-4pm
 Celebrate Earth Day (April 22) and learn about different ways you can do something good for the environment. Cranbrook's own unique setting is our laboratory for learning about important environmental issues like recycling and water quality. Activities take place both outdoors and indoors, so dress appropriately. Free with museum admission.

SCIENCE

Call (toll free) 1-877-GO-CRANBROOK (1-877-462-7262)