

The Dancing Feet

December 2006 Newsletter



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The Rookie Experience

By Caitlin Hewes

The experience of a beginner is quite unlike that of any other. It's a mix of intense frustration, cluelessness, pride, and excitement. Had someone mentioned a "1/16 final" before the Berkeley Beginner Competition last Saturday, I would have said "A what?"

In the wonderful world of the happily clueless, we float along to Saturday practices and Thursday lessons without a care, without ever wondering who put everything together, and at times, even forgetting why we were there. That is, until the competition.

Then it came, like a tidal wave out of center field to hit us smack in the face at 5:30 AM with a pancake full of loud make-up and Aqua net – we actually have to show what we learned!

It became clear as we walked onto the dance floor early that Saturday morning that yes, dance was about sparkle, about hair so stiff you could break a diamond, about makeup so heavy that you might as well have been in Cirque



Credit: Siu Wei Huang

Rookie dancers Jane and Garrett burning up the floor at the Berkeley Beginner Competition.

du Soleil.

But it was more than that. It was, surprisingly, all about dancing! Everything else was secondary. If you hadn't practiced, then no amount of hair gel was going to keep you from looking terrible.

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See the Team in these Upcoming Events

NorCal Winter Frolic
January 27, Palo Alto, CA

UCSD Dance by the Shores
March 3, San Diego, CA

Harvard Invitational
March 10 - 11, Boston, MA

Stanford Cardinal Classic
April 7, Palo Alto, CA

Berkeley Ballroom Classic
April 28, Berkeley, CA

...and anytime at:
www.ucbd.org

Teaching in Motion

By Jessica Park

The mob of rookie dancers on the UC Ballroom team this year get to see three faces week in and week out. Dan Frank is nominally the head teacher; however, he shares his title with Kevin Sinats and Cindy Chou. Despite the fact that many of their pupils have no previous dancing experience, the trio lead the class with energy and enthusiasm. Kevin says he enjoys teaching novices because he wants to “get as many people to dance as [he] can.” While he keeps the fun going throughout the lessons by cracking jokes and making “Kevin faces,” Cindy comments that “it’s fulfilling because rookies are

starting from scratch.” To elaborate, Dan adds, “With beginners, we can see changes within hours - minutes even.”

The team hasn’t always been as rookie friendly; beginners were often left to their own devices. Only about three years ago, the “buddy system” started. In this system, rookies are assigned to advanced dancers, or “buddies”, so that they can receive comments on their dancing, as well as advice and support when things can get stressful. The availability of DanceSport assistants and head teachers during beginner practices on Saturdays also

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Credit: Jenna Tower

Dan Frank, one of the rookie teachers, graces the floor with Sharla Roberts, his partner and Team Captain.

A Brief History of Dance

By Andrew Shu

To many, “ballroom dance” conjures scenes of grand European halls, with stuffy costumes and aristocrats. Yes, ballroom dance has been around for over 200 years, and developed in Europe. But, it has evolved into both social dancing for entertainment and an international competitive sport called DanceSport!

Ballroom dance in its very beginning was indeed a dance for the upper class; the aristocrats that danced ballroom considered folk dancing to be beneath them. There were many customs,

habits, and styles; dance was a huge formal event! But, ballroom dance did not appear out of the blue. It finds its roots in the less formal dances that preceded it; it was formalized by the upper class to suit their style and their social standing. And since then, ballroom has evolved tremendously over the centuries, starting at first with dances such as Bouree, Courante, and Musette, and now its primary forms are the Modern and Latin American styles! Ballroom was especially important in the early 1900’s, and quickly became competi-

tive. Music from the time period was ideal for the dances, and movies often featured ballroom as the dance of the time. However, you will notice that ballroom dance is not as fore in this generation. The creators were very formal people, and they defined the dance very clearly. Ballroom dancers spring their emotion and creativity from these established guidelines and styles. So, it has always been difficult to break into the dance arena. Because each dance has its own form, it needs to be learned and practiced. And who wants to do that? (We do!) In the last half of the 20th century, individual dance has been much more popular with younger gen-

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Did you know ...?

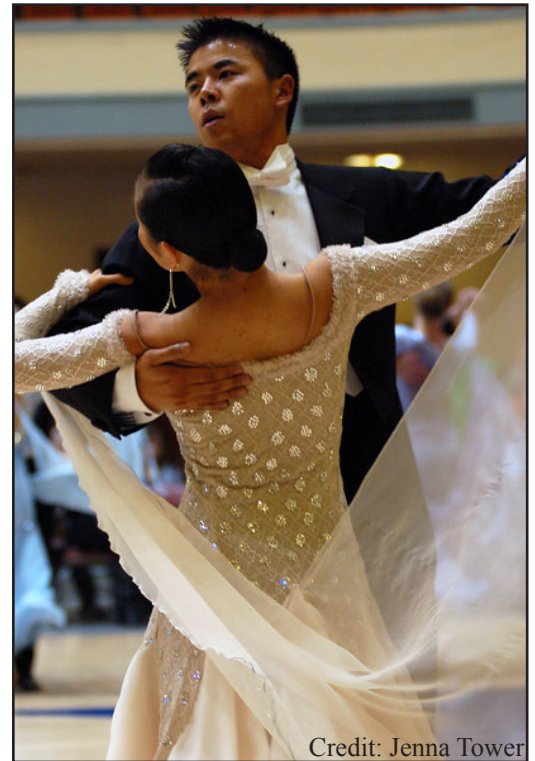
Because of Charles Lindbergh’s 1927 crossing of the Atlantic in one dramatic “hop”, George “Shorty” Snowden named his new dance in honor of this event, calling his invention the “Lindy Hop”.

In The Life of a Dancer



Credit: Jenna Tower

UCBD members prepare to start at the California State DanceSport Championships.



Credit: Jenna Tower

Donovan Sung with his partner, Dianna Lee. The couple teach the Intermediate class.



Credit: Robert Chen

Berkeley Dancers let loose at the Fall Retreat.



Credit: Jenna Tower

Pamela Behnken shows off her poise with partner Lyell Sakaue.

“On with the dance! Let joy be unconfined; no sleep until morn, when youth and pleasure meet. To chase the glowing hours with flying feet.”

- Lord Byron

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allows them to improve faster.

While these changes integrate rookies into the team, as with everything, they don't come free. The DS teachers put in around ten hours of work each week to bring the beginners to competition level within the brief, weekly one and a half hours they have. Their group dynamic is essential to creating an efficient, productive class. Kevin says they work well together because they don't let "one thing [be] the cause of strife and death." Like a jigsaw puzzle, the three of them fit together, despite their differences.

Dan is technique focused; he reasons that it is important to get the information about a dance figure into beginners' brains before they try it out. Kevin describes his style as "trying to get the people to dance a lot" to incorporate the moves into muscle memory. Together, Kevin and Dan balance the class well between information and kinesthetics. When asked about what she contributes to the class, Cindy laughs and mentions that she's the only follower and that she pays attention to fine detail. Dan and Kevin on the other hand, praise Cindy for not only being able to see fine detail, but also "big problems [they] aren't able to see." Each seems to fill a gap which the other two couldn't, while sharing authority equally between the three of them. With their seamless teamwork, commitment and vivacity, it's no wonder over one hundred rookies stuck around.

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So there we were, nervous as horses out of a starting gate, waiting in line to go out and show everyone that in fact, we could dance, and dance well. It was pure thrill. As we exited the dance floor in what seemed like an endless succession of rounds, gradually everything was illuminated and we were having fun!

Our time on the dance floor, however long or short it was, however well or poorly we did, was best summed up by Chris Durant: "This [competition] is the most fun I have ever had in my whole entire life!"

DanceSport competitions are un-

like any other event. While the dancers are looking dignified on the dance floor, the team cheers as though at a football game. At the Berkeley Beginner Ballroom Competition, the words "Ballroom Team" suddenly had so much more meaning than on the practice floor. As Josh Lomelii said, "While I didn't expect dancing for six hours straight with a 15 minute break ... I definitely didn't expect the cheers we would get after every round and expect how much we still need to learn as beginners! I had so much fun during the first competition that I can't wait till the next one!"

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erations than partner dance. With the rise of Rock'n'Roll, when people could dance alone or in groups with absolutely no prior knowledge, dancing became easier to do.

So where is ballroom dance now? Ballroom dance, as it is danced competitively, consists of the International Standard (Waltz, Viennese Waltz, Tango, Foxtrot, and Quickstep) and International Latin (Cha Cha, Rumba, Samba, Pasa Doble, and Jive), as well as an American styles. Competitions were interestingly enough described as a fuse between prom and a track meet! It has all the formality and costume preparation of a high school dance. To top that off, it has the energy, competitiveness, and team aspect of a track meet. At the competitions, dancers from every

generation compete to test their grace, energy, and performance. Preparation for the competitions involves learning, practicing, and developing our dance styles until our personality is added to the dance! In competitive ballroom dance, partners generally practice and compete with each other on a permanent basis. This allows each person to be closely tuned into their partner's signals and movements.

So basically, ballroom dance is alive and well! In fact, the International Olympic Committee has recognized DanceSport as being a sport. It is interesting to consider that even though the concept was developed hundreds of years ago, ballroom dance has evolved so much that it has come to a level of competitive sport!

Please support our team and make a tax-deductible donation. Please make checks out to "Berkeley Ballroom Foundation."

Please send to:

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