

The Dancing Feet

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CalState DanceSport Championships

Contributing Writer
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At 5:00 in the morning on Saturday, Nov 14th, over 100 young dancers were rudely woken by their alarms. Undeterred by the ominous rain outside their rooms, these brave students stumbled along to get their bodies and outfits ready for the day-long California State DanceSport Championships.



Rookie Allison Lefferts at her first CalState Championships

Gathering at the Clark Kerr complex, the UC Berkeley Ballroom Dance Team met and took chartered buses to the Just Dance Ballroom hall in Oakland, CA.

The competition started off with the rookies swaying and sashaying across the ballroom floor. Many dancers were noticeably nervous, especially in the beginning, where starting in synch with the music can impact the rest of the dance. Once in a while, hands, hips and legs did not move in unison as mistakes were made. However, almost every couple will remember that one moment of magic where dancing was effortless and enjoyable and everything seemed to come together just right.

After the rookies, the floor was taken over by incredibly talented kids and advanced dancers, who held the audience in rapturous attention. It was awe inspiring to see senior competitors make dancing appear effortless and elegant.

The event ended late in the evening. While the competition gave a sense of accomplishment, it also gave everyone something to aspire towards, with most of the rookies signing up to continue ballroom next semester in search of dancing magic, camaraderie and glory.



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See the Team in these Upcoming Events

- February 27, 2010
Berkeley Classic
Berkeley, CA

- April 24, 2010
Cardinal Classic
Stanford, CA

- TBD
Spring Fling
Oakland, CA

- TBD
Harvard Invitational
Cambridge, MA

More information
Available from the UCBD
Website at:
www.ucbd.org

2009 Beginner Competition

Contributing Writer
Vincent Yao

Competitions are always intimidating, but there's something especially intimidating about a ballroom dance competition that makes swim competitions, speech competitions, and even martial arts competitions pale in comparison. The crowds are just as large, the competition just as fierce, but there's something else that sets ballroom competitions a notch above other competitions.

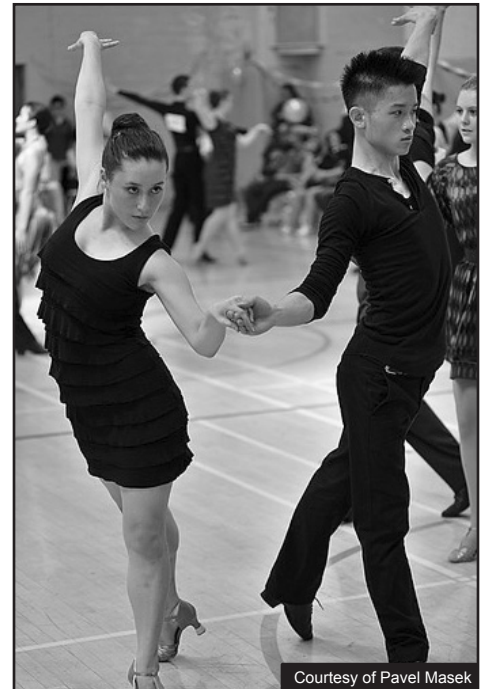
The fear of making an error and throwing your partner off. It might be trying to figure out the tempo of a song you've never heard before and attempting to coordinate complicated steps to that beat. It could be the unpredictability of other couples and trying to find a clear line on the dance floor. With so many

variables to think about and try to get right: holding the right frame, walking on strange shoes, dancing consecutive heats back to back, and more, ballroom competitions seem to have much more intricately involved styles, but also ends up much more rewarding.

With so many issues to think about, it's especially rewarding when you get off the dance floor and realize that you actually managed to get most of those issues right. Avoided collisions? Check. Stayed on tempo? Check. Did the right dance? Check. That satisfaction is always coupled with the complementary knowledge that there are so many other factors that can be improved in the next dance.

This is the reason why the Berkeley Beginner's Competition was so ultimately worthwhile. After every heat,

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Courtesy of Pavel Masek

Laura Cain and Jason Tran at the 2009 Beginner's Competition



From Expert to Novice: A Teacher's Perspective on Trying Something New

Most people strive to become experts in a particular field of study. This process involves becoming more skilled and adept at whatever task or discipline is of concern. Hours spent in practice lead to days, which lead to months, which lead to years, and so on. One day, each person who has spent such time and effort can look back and say that he is no longer a novice—no more would he qualify as an amateur. It is this pursuit of excellence that drive people towards whatever goals they may have. However, I recommend a lesser-recognized alternative: stepping away from the things we excel at and immersing ourselves in something new.

Having a scientific background, I could hardly make such an endorsement without giving some evidence of the positive joy and energy that can be obtained. For me, ballroom dance was my opportunity to have a fresh challenge. Training for years in swim, water polo, basketball, and other sports, I chose to try out ballroom dance on a whim.

It seemed like it could be fun, now all I needed was an opportunity. Luckily, one of my neighbors at the International House was in need of a partner and pulled me in.

As I arrived to free practice on my first day, I thought to myself, I have great control of my body from all the sports I've played—I can just jump in and become a superstar in no time. Obviously, this was not the case. As I began to learn steps and techniques from my partner, I realized that fewer of my skills refined from my previous activities were applicable than I had thought. In fact, there were several things that limited me early on. I couldn't contort my hips in certain directions, my shoulders couldn't flatten out, my sense of balance was thrown off, and worst, I had no ball to throw or work with!

Like all of the other courageous rookie dancers, I kept with it. I worked and practiced as often as possible, even thinking about steps or techniques I was unsure of when working at the high school or sitting in class. If I were to watch a video from the first weeks of practice, I would hardly be able to recognize any of the people in it. Each couple has made incredible strides, performing amazingly at the Berkeley Beginners Competition and then even more so at Cal State. I can look around and see a strong desire to become better and the enormous camaraderie that swirls about the Berkeley ballroom community.

Though our class still has a long way to go, I would certainly attribute this development to each and every person's decision to challenge himself, moving away from his expertise and becoming once again, a novice. It is this courage to expand one's horizons that I would love to bring into my own classroom when I become a teacher, encouraging new ways to think, act, and live within our communities. I would be willing to bet, too, that ballroom dance may just find its way into my future students' lives, as it managed to find its way into mine.

Contributed by: Michael A. Yee

DANCE CAMP

College athletes often brag about the time commitment and grueling practices that hide behind their performance on game day. With hours of practice each week, many of them learn to eat, sleep, and dream their respective sport. And, of course, every sport has their much dreaded “hell week” – one week of intense nonstop practice at the start of a season or big match. Well, ballroom dancing is a sport like any other, but surely there can’t be such a thing as ballroom “hell week,” right?

Au contraire, my friends. Ballroom has its very own hell week. What’s more, we begin it with our very own “hell day.” They call it Dance Camp, and when the Berkeley Ballroom Beginners made their way to Pauley Ballroom the weekend before the CalState Competition, they had no idea what was in store for them.

Some eighty drowsy beginning dancers trudged into Pauley Ballroom between 7AM on Saturday, November 7, without the slightest clue that the instructors had purposely herded them into this momentous event under a tragic euphemism. You see, ‘Dance Camp,’ as we soon found out, was a misnomer; what we should have seen on our schedules for that day was “Ballroom Boot Camp.”

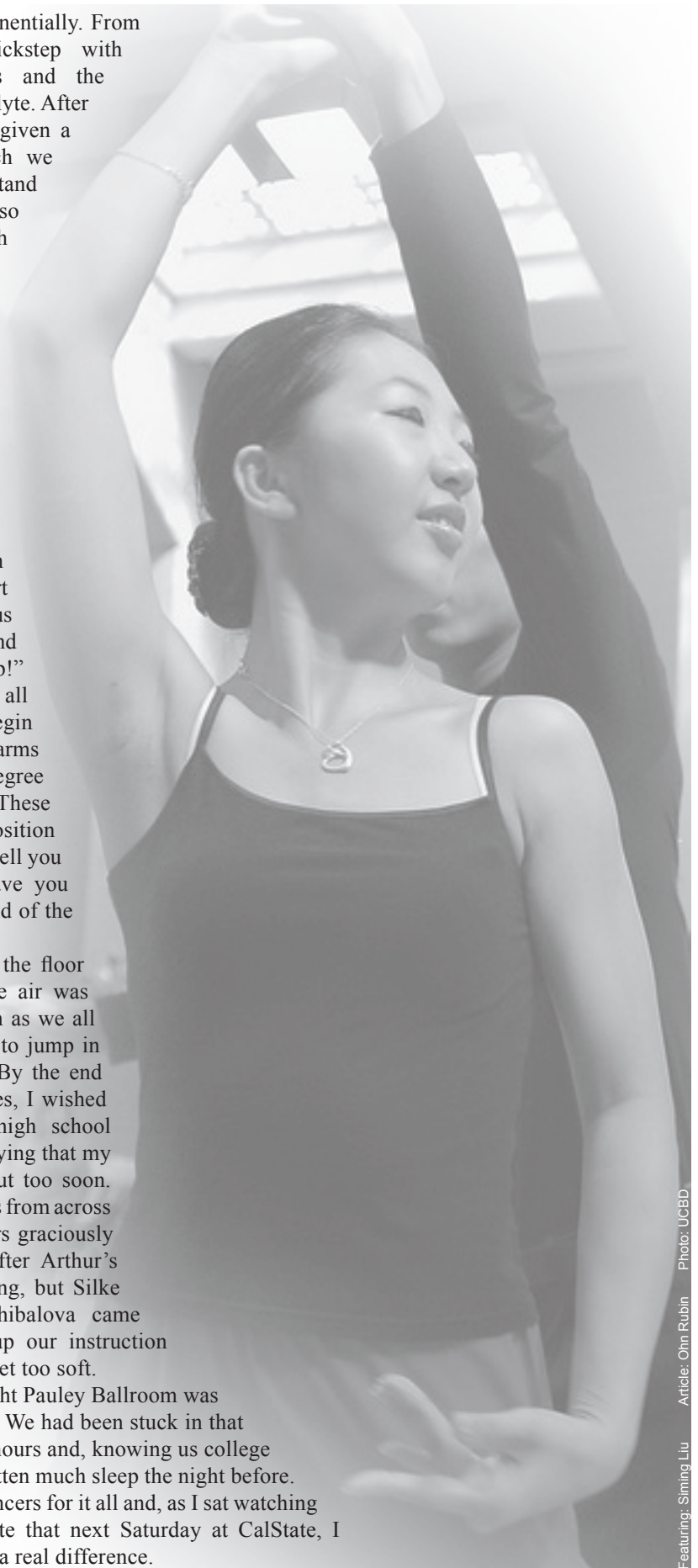
Our first 45 minute lesson was scheduled for tango with Roberta Sun. Roberta’s lesson was our very first exposure to professional dance instruction and, let’s just say, it was a new world to us. For almost an hour we concentrated on only the most basic aspects of posture and footwork, yet our dancing

improved almost exponentially. From there came the quickstep with Tomas Atkocevicious and the waltz with Aira Bubnelyte. After each lesson we were given a free practice in which we could try to understand how so few words in so few minutes led to such great improvement.

Before we knew it, 1:30 PM rolled around and we were exhausted. There had been no breaks, no time for food, but we couldn’t wait. Arthur Sheyn came for our jive lesson and we were privileged to learn why our DanceSport instructors had told us we’d be tired at the end of the day. “Arms up!” he told us when we’d all gathered around to begin the lesson. All our arms went up at ninety-degree angles to our bodies. “These will be your default position for the lesson unless I tell you otherwise... I will have you sweating before the end of the next twenty minutes.”

Five minutes later the floor was thumping and the air was filled with perspiration as we all desperately attempted to jump in time with the music. By the end of those fifteen minutes, I wished I was back in my high school wrestling practice, praying that my arms wouldn’t give out too soon. No doubt laughing at us from across the room, our superiors graciously granted us a break after Arthur’s pampering and coddling, but Silke Miller and Maria Shibalova came afterwards to finish up our instruction and ensure we didn’t get too soft.

By the end of the night Pauley Ballroom was a post-fight battlefield. We had been stuck in that room for over twelve hours and, knowing us college students, we hadn’t gotten much sleep the night before. But, we were better dancers for it all and, as I sat watching my teammates compete that next Saturday at CalState, I knew that it had made a real difference.





Header: Elfina Ho and Rhesa Nathanael

Middle: Jennifer Lara and Royce Ma

Far Right: Joseph Lian and Mei Tao

Left: Chris Henzie and Anna Mebust



*—Beginner’s Competition
(Continued from Page 2)*

we got a chance to self-assess our own performance, and even get feedback from the more advanced dancers. By being put into the spotlight, it seemed that our attention to the dance and drive to perform really well was amplified, compared to our weekly practices.

This motivational push didn’t limit itself to just the competition--in the aftermath of the competition, we realized exactly which dances and which techniques we needed to work on and improve.

Even though many of us may have walked into the Beginner’s Competition with the fear of looking foolish, it ultimately was a fantastic experience. Not only did we get a chance to improve our dance techniques

and figure out what we still needed to work on, but we also got to know our teammates more intimately as we cheered for them between heats. As a beginner, it’s really difficult imagining that we’ll ever attain the polish and elegance of our more advanced colleagues, but after looking at pictures of the event afterwards, I’d have to say that we’re taking long, well-timed, strides in the right direction.

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