

Would You Like to Dance?

By Jenna E. Caputo

Ballroom Dancing – passion, blinding sequins, skimpy outfits. That’s what most people think of when they hear “ballroom.” Well, that and the Hollywood and sports stars that have traded in their Italian leather soles for a sleek pair of dance shoes. If you caught yourself pausing the remote on *Dancing with the Stars* this year, you’re not the only one. Millions of people have tuned in to watch the stars go from bumbling idiots to the graceful Fred and Gingers of our day gliding across the dance floor. Spawning several spin-off shows, *Dancing with the Stars* has found its way into American culture. And with the rise in dance movies, ballroom dancing (which includes the other social dances as well as Latin and Swing) has become an unprecedented multi-generational trend.

Dance is obviously not new, but something we keep coming back to. As Don Dworkin, a musician locally known for his work with the toe-tapping groups *Doc Scanlon’s Rhythm Boys* and *Reggie’s Red Hot Feetwarmers*, says that “in almost 30 years of playing dance music, I’ve noticed that the music runs in cycles and always comes back to the great standards of the ‘30s and ‘40s. The music of George Gershwin, Glenn Miller and Louis Jordan will always connect with something deep down in the American dancing psyche.”

It is no surprise that ballroom dancing offers an elegant and passionate alternative to the gyrating we’ve been seeing on the dance floor, but the real surprise is that this timeless tradition that once was called “your grandmother’s dancing” is now also being embraced by a much younger audience. In explanation to this new infatuation by the younger generations, Brian McDonald, president of the National Dance Council of America said, “Young people like it because it’s different, artistic and has a great competitive attitude about it.”

Not only that, but surprise – it has many health benefits too! Studies have shown that a competition ballroom dancer

has an equal breathing rate and muscle exertion as an Olympic level, 800-meter runner. A dancing workout can complement use of exercise equipment, gym memberships and outdoor workouts, especially if it becomes a chore to workout in the “traditional” sense.

Dave Wolf, owner of *The Saratoga SAVOY Center of Dance in Saratoga*, has seen many of these benefits in his students. “One of our students lost 30 pounds when he started with us. And just the other day another student came in all excited that she had lost two dress sizes.” With an extensive background, Dave has developed dance programs that have been endorsed by the American Heart Association and has instituted programs in schools for ages 11 and up, as well as hosting the highly popular, live music, monthly Diamond Dance in Saratoga.

Ready to get out there and try it? While there are many great studios and dances in the area, a fun way to start might be to attend the *The Flurry Festival* February 13 through 15 at the Saratoga Springs City Center. The popular event attracts dancers, musicians and sightseers from all over the country and abroad.

Whether just for the health benefits, enjoyment of a night out, a new competitive sport or to get ready for the special dance on your wedding day, social dancing allows everyone to be part of this classic American tradition that is disguising itself as a hot new craze. What are you waiting for? Let’s dance! ■

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The 28th Annual Flurry Festival will take place February 13-15. For more information, visit www.flurryfestival.org.

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