

HOW TO GET STARTED AS A SOCIAL BALLROOM DANCER

Typically a new dancer will start as a social dancer, attracted by varying methods: witnessing a dance-related television event, yearning for more “social” in their social life, or being talked into it by a spouse, friend or relative. A small percentage of social dancers may find that their love of dance compels them to become competitive dancers or DanceSport Athletes.

However, the vast majority of new dancers will remain a social dancer all of their life and will reap many benefits from this activity. The most obvious benefit is that a competent social dancer is very popular with the opposite sex and in great demand at social events.

Your participation in a regular program of ballroom dancing will also produce significant mental and physical health benefits. Dancing is a great stress reliever. It builds confidence, alertness and a good attitude. Plus, it has been proven to be a great physical benefit as it physically tones the whole body in enjoyable exercise.

GETTING STARTED.

So, how do you get started as a social dancer? The first step-- contact the USA Dance/USABDA chapter in your area. (Note: the Phoenix chapter can be accessed through their web site: <http://phoenixusadance.org/>. The site contains a Dance Resource section which includes useful information regarding local studios and independent dance instructors which offer group ballroom dance classes and private instruction for beginners.)

Attend a chapter social dance and introduce yourself to one of the chapter officers. They will be happy to help you get started on the right foot and in a manner that will not cost you an arm and a leg.

SELECTION OF YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Your most important decision after you decide to become a social dancer is the selection of your instructor. Ask each prospective teacher about their dance background, including professional tests and examination credentials that certify the level of teaching qualification attained. Such credentials, when accompanied by actual experience in teaching beginner dancers, offer a good measure of assurance that you will not waste your time and money learning things that you may need to relearn later on.

DANCE STYLES

Start with group lessons in the American style Bronze syllabus. This will give you a basic foundation for social dancing that will be useful all of your life, regardless of whether you later decide to become a DanceSport athlete.

PARTNER VERSUS NO PARTNER

Ballroom dance includes any dance performed with a partner. However, it is not necessary to have a regular partner when you first start dancing. Most group classes accept singles, and you should not hesitate to commence without a partner.

However, if you already have a partner, you will quickly find that learning to dance together adds an entirely new dimension to your relationship.

PRIVATE LESSONS VERSUS GROUP CLASSES

Which are best? It depends on you and your budget. Private lessons are more expensive, but they also provide individualized attention that can greatly speed up the learning process. On the other hand, group lessons are inexpensive, stimulating, challenging are lots of fun and are a great way to try out a variety of dances.

Since group lessons tend to focus on steps and patterns rather than on technique, it is especially recommended that men students take a private lesson every few weeks and use that time to study the technique of movement involved, including how to effectively lead his partner through the figures taught in the group classes. Women will find that occasional private lessons help add style and grace to the movements they learn in group classes, as well as tips on how to follow her partner.

CONTRACTS

Some studios and independent dance instructors ask students to sign a contract for a specified number of lessons with a price that may include private lessons, group lessons, dance parties, workshops, etc. Just remember, none of it is free, and you may not need, or be able, to take advantage of all the elements in such packages.

(NOTE: In November 1992, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued a warning about the sales practices of some dance studios and suggested that potential problems can be avoided by comparison shopping for dance lessons. To read those FTC suggestions, click on: [FTC-Dance Studios](#). Also, The National Dance Council of America (NDCA) serves as an umbrella organization for dance professionals, and the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance is one NDCA member organization that provides certification to instructors. If you feel you have a need to file a breach of ethics complaint about a studio or instructor, you may contact these organizations on their websites at www.ndca.org and www.usistd.org respectively.)

KEY ELEMENTS

Becoming a good dancer always includes three key elements: expert instruction, practice and frequent use of what you are learning. Take a few minutes each day to practice what you have been working on in class. 15 minutes each day in which you focus your mind and body on executing the figures will reinforce the learning process and give you the confidence to apply those skills in a social dance setting. Remember, "Use it or lose it!"

THE PAYOFF

It will not happen overnight, but as you learn and put into practice the things you learn in class, your confidence in your dance abilities will increase, and you will begin to capture the joy of dance. Soon dancers of the opposite sex will begin seeking you out and asking you to dance with them. You will have arrived!

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