Ballroom dancing back in style, up in enrollment

By Beth Hege Emerald Contributor

What comes around, goes around, and around; in this case, it also rumbas, waltzes and cha-chachas. Ballroom dance is back in style, and students at the University are catching the romance.

A quick look at dance department figures shows that five years ago, during winter term, 1988, 80 students took two sections of Ballroom I. Ballroom II wasn't even offered.

This term, the University has doubled the courses and doubled the enrollment. That translates into four sections of Ballroom I with 143 students, and 24 enrolled in Ballroom II.

"Ballroom is definitely in," said ballroom dance instructor Lise Sherry.

Classes are held in a third-level Gerlinger Annex gymnasium. A far cry from the elegant ballrooms of New York, Paris or Portland, the room with its gray concrete walls and climbing equipment still offers the essential elements for any tango, polka or swing: a smooth floor and a record player blasting big-band music.

Only the sounds of footsteps and laughter manage to cut through the schmaltzy tunes of yesteryear.

"When I am out there, I'm always smiling," said Chan Armsbury, a senior in romance languages. "It's fun to struggle through the steps. You can laugh because everyone is on the same level, making the same mistakes."

At first, people dance like they are wearing ski boots. They plod along awkwardly and with heavy steps. Rather than gliding through the waltz or fox trot,



Ballroom dance instructor Lise Sherry watches as two students walk through a dance step. Many students begin the class with two left feet, but anyone who can count can ballroom dance, Sherry said.

men drive their partners around like bumper cars, with sudden starts, stops and the occasional outright collision.

"Sometimes it takes a while for it to get from their head to their feet," Sherry said. "People have come into my class with two left feet, but by the end of the term, they are completely different."

Sherry said anyone who can count can ballroom dance.

Ballroom dance offers wide appeal, and 53 majors are represented in this term's enrollment figures. A good number are undergraduate undeclared majors, but psychology, prebusiness administration and architecture departments made a strong showing.

In Ballroom I, nearly a third of the students are freshmen. Ballroom II students, however, include only three underclassmen. The other 21 are seniors, juniors, law and graduate students.

Justin Erickson, a senior in telecommunications and film, said he took Ballroom I to spend more time with his girlfriend. Many couples do this but find they have to switch partners periodically in class.

"I don't like it when I have to dance with guys," he said.

Erickson's class is one of the few gender-imbalanced classes where men are the majority.

The resurgence of ballroom dance is a trend that has captured more than just University students.

Films like Strictly Ballroom and Danzon are stealing the silver screen, and in major cities throughout the United States, flashy disco lights have been replaced with chandeliers and hardwood floors. New Jersey even has a 24-hour "Dial-a-Dance" hotline that lists social dances.

According to a recent issue of Journal of Popular Culture, ballroom is back in style for a simple reason: It's romantic.

University junior and rumba amateur Jason Tilley agreed.

"It's suave," he said. "If you want to romance someone, ball-room dance with them. Look right into their eyes."

Tilley extended his arms as though holding a partner, took a few gliding sidesteps and smiled. "I like to lead, to see how much of a cheesy romantic I can be," he said.

Freshman Kimi Jellum said she likes dancing with a strong lead and that ballroom dance evokes images of royalty for her.

"It's something a prince and princess would do," Jellum said.

For some students, learning to fox trot and waltz isn't so much a part of the romantic realm as the practical.

Andrea Hummon, a pre-business administration major, said she is taking the class to gain social graces.

"My dad is involved in a lot of social events, and I don't want to keep walking over other people's feet," Hummon said. "A lot of my friends are getting married. I have a large family and have to go to a lot of weddings. Everyone needs (to know how to dance) at one time or another."

A Ph.D. candidate in computer science, A.V.S. Sastry also said he "needed" ballroom dance, not for social reasons, but for a change of pace from his research.

"I wanted to do something totally different," he said. "It's fun to mingle with the rhythm. I love the swing."

POLICE BEAT

The following incidents were reported to the University Office of Public Safety and the Eugene police department March 1-7.

•The Phi Gamma Delta fraternity, 791 E. 15th Ave., reported a burglary March 2. The burglary occurred during winter break, according to police reports. The fraternity reported 11 kitchen knives, a juice machine and two cordless drills missing. A window and a freezer door were damaged in the break-in. The total estimated loss is \$1,770, according to police reports.

•Four University students were cited for their roles in a party on the 1100 block of Mill Street March 7. Police responded to a complaint of a loud party and cited one student for furnishing alcohol to minors, one for noise disturbance and two others for minor in possession of alcohol.

Officers said they arrived at the party and saw numerous minors drinking in the backyard. According to police reports, when the suspected minors saw the police officers, someone said, "Cops! Let's get out of here." They threw down their cups of beer and ran inside the house. One of the officers contacted a student who lived at the house and cited him for noise distur-

bance. Another officer cited two students who were underage for minor in possession of alcohol.

The fourth student, who also lived at the residence but was not at the party, was cited the next day for furnishing alcohol to minors. According to police reports, the fourth student was cited because his name was on the keg receipt. The student told police he was feeling ill the night of the party, so he went to his girlfriend's house instead of attending the party.

•An incident of criminal mischief was reported March 7 on the 1300 block of Ferry Street. A suspect smashed a window out of a car and stole a fanny pack that contained more than 100 keys. The keys belonged to a maintenance worker, and the total loss was valued at \$300

•Three University students were cited March 7 for minor in possession at the Beta Theta Pi fraternity, 1009 Patterson St. Police were responding to a noise complaint when they observed that some of the people at the party looked underage. According to police reports, the three women who were cited admitted drinking beer at the party.

• A 25-year-old military deserter was arrested on the

1300 block of Patterson Street March 8. Police were responding to a call that the man was threatening to commit suicide. When police contacted the man, he told them the name of his doctor. Police contacted the doctor and found out the suspect was a military deserter. After a hospital observation, the suspect was judged not to be a threat to himself or others and was taken to jail on a federal military hold.

• A 20-year-old man was arrested and cited for using an invalid driver's license, minor in possession of alcohol and providing false information to police March 8. A police officer who was on the 800 block of East 12th Avenue observed a man run onto the Northwest Christian College campus and hide in the bushes. When the officer approached the man, he smelled of alcohol and was having trouble standing. According to police reports, the man handed his wallet to the officer when the he asked for identification.

According to police reports, the man had three IDs in his wallet with his picture and different names on them. Police said the man had one fake ID to get into bars, another fake University ID that he used to ride the bus and a third legitimate ID that was his own.

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