

FEATURES

Fancy Footwork

■ The Ballroom Dance Club welcomes University students and community members to its Friday night dances

By Marcus Hathcock
Oregon Daily Emerald

Slow... slow... quick, quick. More than 100 synchronized feet shuffle across the hardwood floors on Nov. 16 while doing the box step in 220 Gerlinger.

It's just another Friday night for the Oregon Ballroom Dance Club, as the Cuban dance known as the rumba comes alive.

This fancy footwork doesn't occur solely during special occasions or during Department of Dance classes.

With the exception of some holiday weekends, the OBDC hosts a dance in Gerlinger Hall every Friday night. These dances, which usually run from 7:30 to 11:30 p.m., start with beginning and intermediate dance lessons, followed by a three-hour open dance.

Although the OBDC is a registered student group in the ASUO, the benefits of the club aren't reserved for University students. Regardless of age or school attendance, anyone can attend an OBDC dance, group president Selina Braun said.

Braun said about half of those who attend the functions are University students. Virtually every age range was represented at the Nov. 16 dance.

"We used to say the age range was between 15 and 50," said Lane Community College freshman Zane Hart. "But now, it looks a lot more like between 5 and 90. It's a real eclectic mix of

people."

Friday night dances start with an hourlong lesson. Braun said most people attend the beginning lessons, which are designed for people who have had little to no experience. Two dances are taught at each lesson.

The intermediate lessons are aimed at individuals who have a base knowledge of certain styles of dance, and they build on that knowledge to give participants greater ability within that dance style, Braun said.

"(Dance) classes are only two hours a week," former University student Rob Alba said. "These dances give you a chance to build on what you learn there."

Ballroom I instructor Elizabeth Wartluft demonstrated the rumba and the samba at the beginners' lesson Nov. 16.

Wartluft taught the dances step by step. Within 30 minutes, the room of amateurs danced together with impressive accuracy.

And almost every face in the room was smiling.

The smiles only faded slightly later that evening, as participants attempted the fast-paced samba.

"Samba is a hard dance to begin with," Hart said. "Constant triple steps (three steps for two beats) are hard to do."

At around 8:30 p.m., Wartluft thanked the crowd for their hard work and left them to put their new knowledge to use. The lights

dimmed, and ballroom dance music blared as the dancing portion of the evening began.

"This is when it really starts," Hart said.

For the rest of the dance, the dancers are left to their own devices, and they don't necessarily dance the style taught in the lesson.

When the people weren't out on the dance floor on Nov. 16, they were talking and having a good time with each other. "It's just a great place to hang out with friends and dance," Braun said.

Alba said he enjoyed the community as well, and he claimed to recognize one-third of the people at the Friday night dance.

What builds such community, Braun said, are the consistent core of people who love to dance.

"There are definitely regulars who are always at the dances," Braun said. "You can count on them to be there and have someone to dance with."

People dance for many reasons, Braun said, but her main reason is relaxation from everyday stress.

"It's nice to be able to just forget about things for a few hours and to just dance," Braun said.

Alba and Hart said they both enjoy the workout dancing provides.

"It's fun, it doesn't take up much time, burns up as many calories as a StairMaster and is much more fun," Hart said.

Dancers pay \$4 if they are students or senior citizens, or \$5 if they are from the general community. Members of the ballroom club get free admission, Braun said.

Braun said the overall goal of the OBDC is to promote social dance and provide an alternative to partying.

"We provide a drug- and alcohol-free environment for people of the community to come together and have fun," Braun said.

Emerald features reporter Marcus Hathcock can be reached at marcushathcock@dailyemerald.com.

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