

Swinging around Stumptown

by Maddy Kays

A drum marks the start of Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing (With a Swing)" as dancers partner up and take to the floor. When the brass section jumps in the dancers take flight and, to a bystander, their feet never touch the ground. The guys are swinging and the girls are spinning, feet are tapping on the sidelines. It's a scene straight out of the 1940s brought into the era of smart phones, social media and electronic music. A DJ on stage in the ballroom of the Norse Hall in Northeast Portland brings back the big band sounds of Louis Prima, the Andrews Sisters, Benny Goodman and more.

Mindy Barnhart, owner of Stumptown Dance, looks on proudly from the sidelines. Barnhart began swing dancing when she was in high school but really took to it after a running injury in college left her unable to do cross country. She started going to Stumptown Dance in 2005, back when it was called Westside Swing and was held in a grange hall in Tigard. She purchased the company from the original owner in 2009.

"One of my favorite things about Stumptown Swing is the influence we've had on the swing scene in the Northwest and on the West Coast in general," says Sam Estrem, Barnhart's dance partner and co-instructor. "To hear people coming back saying that Portland is a hub of good dancers and dancing venues makes me so proud of all the work that we've done."

You can find Stumptown Dance at the Norse Hall in Northeast 11th and Couch Street any given Sunday night. The weekly Sunday night dances are manned by approximately 18 people, not including Mindy herself who teaches the intermediate and beginning lessons before the social dancing begins.

Jobs include two DJs, one other dance instructor and the front desk staff (a group of volunteers who alternate every half hour with two people manning the desk at all times). For a cover price of \$8 a person (save two dollars with a valid student ID),



Photo by Becca Moreno

Sam Estrem and Molly Burkhart swingdance at the Sunday night social dance at the Scottish Rite Center in Portland.

you get a half-hour dance lesson and three hours of social swing dancing. The intermediate lesson begins at 7 p.m., the beginning lesson is at 7:30 p.m. and the social dancing begins at 8 p.m. For more information, check out their website at www.stumptowndance.com.

Not sure that Stumptown is for you? You can try your hand at swing dancing at CCC! There are beginning and intermediate/advanced swing classes offered every term. Look for them in the upcoming course schedule. Each class is only 50 minutes long and fulfills one PE credit.