

Dance at any age for health, fun and rhythm

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FOR COAST WEEKEND

Think you're too old to learn ballet, tap, contra or even square dancing? With resolutions made in January possibly waning and 2019 nearly half over, it's never too late or too early to make a new move.

Ballet

Jeanne Maddox Peterson, owner and director of Maddox Dance Studio in Warrenton, said there's movement for everybody.

"The oldest student I've had was 89," Peterson said. "She took tap and ballet and had no previous background in dance. My youngest student was 2 1/2 years old. She kept up with dance all the way through high school."

"When you start dancing you tend to want to do more active things in your life," Peterson said.

Movement affects a person's cardio, balance, alignment and coordination, she added.

Two of her former students are physical therapists at Columbia Memorial Hospital.

"... They have been doing special workshops for our kids and helping them with certain problems that they have like core strength and turn out of the legs or back strength and balance," Peterson said.

You also gain spatial awareness in dance and movement.

"You learn to do your moves in the space you have to dance in," Peterson said. "You learn to adjust, which is a good lesson for life."

Musicality is a large part of movement, too.

"Any kind of dance or movement is like a music lesson in itself because there's a rhythm that you need to follow and the notes you need to know," Peterson said.

Cheryl Cochran, owner of Beach Ballet in Long Beach, Washington, enjoys the interconnectedness of dance and life.

"Dancing helps with everything. The one thing I love about dance and how it relates to academics and just real life is you're always working in rhythms and patterns," Cochran said.

"For younger students just memorizing basic terminology, learning some

French, learning small combinations. It's all math-oriented. Dance combines engineering, geometry."

Cochran opened her studio in September and said her youngest student is 2 and a half years old.

"We are a beginning studio so all the students are beginners, but we are having a great time."

Cochran also has an adult ballet class. It focuses on ballet barre technique and ballet stretches. You are never too old to learn to dance, she said.

"I would tell someone to come try a class, be comfortable, do what you can do," she said. "The main thing is to have a smile on your face, have fun and realize that your body is thanking you."

You also have to be conscious of what your body reacts to.

"Everybody finds a little niche and then you work into the other areas. In my classes I always make sure to address each student on something positive they did," she said.

People feel beautiful when practicing ballet.

"I don't care what size, what shape, whatever you are, you are always going to feel beautiful as a ballerina."

Contra and square dancing

Contra dance leader Dave Ambrose agrees with Peterson and Cochran about never being too old to dance.

"A person is never too old or too young," Ambrose said.

Indeed, at contra dances, a dancing parent often holds a child who is too young to dance.

Dancers have to adjust when dancing contra.

"Since all ages are welcome at contra dances, you may dance with a child, an elderly person, possibly a frail person or an energetic younger person," Ambrose said.

Craig Holt, president of the Hayshakers Square Dance Club, and Sylvia Davis, a longtime club member, said a two-hour square dance is like walking 10 miles.

In addition to social aspects of square dancing, there are also added health benefits.

"Dancing gets your heart rate up, keeps your mind active and it's a great aerobic exercise," Holt said.



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Students practice a ballet routine at a dance studio in Warrenton.



Cheryl Cochran opens a ballet class by having her students stretch together.