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The Dance Scene in Athens
From Swing to Square

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Tango instructors Fuad Elhage and Stephanie Lynn

Want to live longer, smarter, stronger? **Then Dance, Dance, Dance!**

By ARLENE WILLIAMS

Whether bopping to Bon Jovi, swinging to Benny Goodman, or moving with Motown, dancing is the way to go if you want to stay happy and healthy.

According to numerous studies, people who start dancing show significant improvement in balance, strength, endurance, flexibility, cognitive ability, bone density, coordination and cardiovascular health.

So why is it so good for you? Well, when you dance, you release emotions and express feelings. It also involves cognitive skills, memory and calls on different muscle groups. As you dance, you speed up, slow down, execute turns, stretches and poses – all of this benefits the aging body. And it's definitely not boring – like maybe your exercise bike or treadmill are?

Dancing is sociable and as we age, loneliness is as big a

Arlene Williams lives in Winterville and when she's not dancing, riding her horse, or caring for her mother she writes for Boom.

health risk as smoking. And even people contending with Parkinson's, arthritis, heart disease, even dementia can benefit from dancing.

So, how do you get started? If there is some style of dance or music that speaks to you, then start with that. You can always add others as you gain confidence.

What are your choices? Researchers say Tango is great for your balance; it's a walking dance so it's easy on your knees. It is also dramatic, playful, and exciting to learn. If you like a dance with a lot of turns, great music, plus an aerobic workout, Swing is the way to go. Of course, Latin dances, like Salsa and Rumba keep your spine supple, your hips flexible, and your rhythm strong. Learn the grace of Waltz and Fox Trot and you will use them all your life. In Square Dance, you'll find a lot of social interaction and community. I love boot scooting to a Two Step, and Clogging is just plain fun.

Single and worried about not having a partner? Line dancing is a great way to get your feet wet, or should we say moving. But let me assure you, in any style you choose, there are usually enough men at the classes to go around and, if a class comes up a little short, there are usually some great female leads who normally attend.

So now you have an idea of some of the styles. Let's look at who teaches what and some of the locations where you can kick up your heels.



Argentine Tango

Fuad Elhage, a lecturer of Spanish at UGA, is one of the very few in Athens who teach the Argentine Tango. Fuad started the UGA Tango Club and he has been an instructor for the Project Safe fundraiser, "Dancing with the Athens Stars" since 2015.

The Argentine Tango is often confused with Ballroom Tango but it is a very different form of dance. Argentine Tango doesn't involve sequenced choreography or memorized steps, it is an improvised, spontaneous dance,

and is based on variations of walking, turning and pausing.

It is said that the tango is "El amor de tres minutos," the three-minute love. Because there is no pre-ordained sequence to the dance, and no verbal signals, the leader and follower must be totally in tune with each other and the music to connect and dance in harmony.

Stephanie Lynn, a senior IT manager at UGA, was in the audience when Fuad Elhage and Susanna Drennan performed the first Tango dance in Athens at the 2016 "Dancing with the Stars" event. She was so entranced she reached out to Fuad to learn Tango, and now for the last three years, they've worked together to expand Latin Dance and the Argentine Tango in Athens.

Stephanie and Fuad also organize the twice yearly Milonga Tropical, a Latin dance and workshop event. The next one is planned for Oct. 28 at Hotel Indigo.

Events

Argentine Tango Lessons

Monday 6:15 - 8:15 p.m.

UGA Tate Student Center, Room 473

Athens Milonga Tropical

Thursday, Oct. 27, Hotel Indigo, 500 College Ave.

Free beginner Tango lesson at 6:30 p.m.

Performances and social dancing including tango, salsa, bachata, and merengue from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. (All levels welcome)

Stay in the Know!

facebook.com/athensmilongatropical

facebook.com/athenstangoproject/

Fuad Elhage: 706 338 2920, felhage@uga.edu

Line Dancing

Line Dancing is where a group of people, in lines and rows, dance a repeated sequence of steps, all at the same time. Line dancing gained popularity in the '70s, and it wasn't just for country music. I am sure that most of us remember the Macarena!

Since the steps are repeated, it's easy to pick up and follow along and it teaches you to move your body to the beat and will help improve your balance. You also do not need a partner, so it is great for singles who want to ease into dancing.

Linda Joyner and David Garrett met dancing at the VFW Post 2875, a popular dance spot at 835 Sunset Drive. Now they are dancing six days a week either in Athens or the metro Atlanta area. Linda teaches Line

Dancing on Mondays at one location and on Tuesdays at another (*See below*). On Fridays she is at the VFW, leading dancers during the band break while David DJs.

David says that it's great exercise! And he wants Beginners to know that while it can get a little frustrating in the beginning, "give it time—you just have to stick with it."

Intermediate and Beginner Line Dancing is also taught, during the day, to seniors at the Athens Community Council on Aging (ACCA) by Linda "Boots" Barnes.



one another Square Dancers say that Square Dancing is friendship set to music so if you like a real feeling of community and family, Square Dancing is for you!

Events

Line Dance Lessons (\$10)
Tuesdays, 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Bogart Community Center
141 E. Thompson St., Bogart

VFW Post 2875 (\$10)
Fridays during the Band Break
835 Sunset Dr., Athens

Beginning Line Dancing
Tuesdays, 1 p.m. - 2 p.m.

Intermediate Line Dancing
Tuesdays, 12 noon - 1 p.m.
ACCA, Harris Room
135 Hoyt St., Athens
\$5 for non-members

Stay in the Know!
Contact David Garrett for more information
at 706-614-0648.
Contact Mary at the ACCA at 706-549-4850
Allison@dancefx.org

Events

Classic City Squares
2nd and 4th Sundays, 2:30 - 4:30 p.m.
Wesley Woods of Athens
801 Riverhill Dr.

Happy Squares
2nd and 4th Thursdays, 7 - 9 p.m.
The Smith Cabinet Shop
1760 Old Epps Bridge Rd.

Stay in the Know!
Classic City Squares
Kathy Larson: 315-855-0009
kathylyndall@gmail.com
Susan Derrick: 770-315-9319
sderrick9318@gmail.com

Happy Squares
Rev. Kathleen Deegan-Neal: 706-255-7929
kdn@watkumc.org

Square Dancing

Square Dancing is a type of country dancing that starts with four couples facing one another in a square, with the steps and movements shouted out by a caller

Square Dancing is easy to do, says Kathy Larson, a longtime enthusiast, "If you can walk, you can Square Dance." Athens has two groups that have been around for years, Classic City Squares, which does Modern Western Square dance with rounds, and Happy Squares. Both invite visitors to just drop in. Don't worry if you don't have a partner, singles are always welcome!

Besides the fun, you'll find that Square Dancing is great exercise for the body and brain, as you dance your way through the called patterns. It is also a great social activity, as the successful completion of a "tip" (dance) requires everyone in the square to support and guide

Salsa

Christie Moody and her husband, Michael, have been dancing together a long time. In fact, Christie says she and Michael use dance as marriage counseling. "I can be really stressed out, but I start dancing and I leave all that on the floor."

Now she and her daughter, Gwyneth, teach Salsa together in Athens at the Cloud Nightclub. Originally a street dance, the basics of Salsa can be picked up quickly. So, if you like Latin Music, you will love learning Salsa and I know, having danced with her before, that Christie is not only a great dancer, she's a wonderful teacher. You will be out on the dance floor in no time!



Events

Cuban-style Salsa Lessons

Wednesdays, 6 -7 p.m. Intermediate class
 Beginner classes & Salsa Social, 7 - 8 p.m.
 Cloud Nightclub, 164 E Clayton St.
 \$10 class & social, \$5 social only
 Check Facebook

SaBaCha Dance Social

2nd Thursday of the month.
 Lessons in Bachata, Salsa, and ChaChaCha,
 Beginner Lessons at 7:30 p.m.
 DJ and Dancing at 8:30 p.m.
 Hendershot's (Check Facebook to confirm location)
 237 Prince Ave. (\$10)

Beginning Salsa

Tuesdays, 7 p.m.
 Dance FX, 396 Foundry St.
 Partners not required; Drop-in rates
 Dancefx.com

Swing

Melissa Gogo takes her Swing very seriously, so you'll find her at The Studio Athens almost every day! Fifteen years after moving here, and 13 years after taking her first dance lesson, Melissa found herself performing with three adult dance companies and now she is a primary organizer and instructor for Athens Swing Nights.

Swing dancing originated in Harlem during the 1920s with jazz music, and where it was called "Lindy Hop." It's easy to learn and you can swing to almost any kind of music.

Be aware there are two types of Swing. East Coast Swing and West Coast Swing. Of the two styles, East Coast is the easiest to learn. Regardless, you can dance swing to big band music, blues, rockabilly, country, '50s rock'n'roll and soul.

At The Studio and other swing events, there's usually a formal lesson, then the music starts, and you get to practice. It's a partner dance but there are always some available. I have taken lessons with Melissa and not only

are she and her instructors very patient the other dancers are also welcoming and forgiving of the occasional misstep. If you want to learn Swing, this is a great way to do it!

A new addition to the dance calendar in this area is the Carolina Shag. Some folks in Greensboro have started dance lessons and monthly dance nights. Shag music is different in that it's more rhythm and blues-based and includes songs by the Drifters, Mary Wells, and the Swingin' Medallions.

Events

The Studio Athens

West Coast Swing Lessons
 Thursday, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
 160 Tracy St., Unit 8, (\$16)

Athens Westie Night (West Coast Swing)

2nd and 4th Saturdays each month
 Lesson at 7:30; 8 -10 p.m. Social Dance
 The Studio Athens (\$10)

Big Band Athens Social Dances

The last Thursday of the month, 8 -10 p.m.
 Hendershot's, 237 Prince Ave. \$10

ACCA Swing Lesson & Social

Once per month on Mondays, 3 - 5 p.m.
 Athens Community Council on Aging
 135 Hoyt St. \$8

The Lake Oconee Shag Club

First Wednesday each month,
 Lessons from 6 - 7 p.m., Dance until...
 Oconee Brewing Company
 202 North West St., Greensboro (Free)

Stay in the Know!

Athensswingnight5678@gmail.com
 On Facebook, too

The Studio Athens

160 Chase St., Unit 8
 Thestudioathens.com

Athens Community Council on Aging

Accaging.com; 706-549-4850

LakeOconeeShag@gmail.com

Venues and more photos at BoomAthens.com



Ballroom Dancing

“Ballroom Dance” refers to traditional partnered dance forms done by a couple. These can include the Foxtrot, Jive, Lindy Hop, Mambo, Pasodoble, Quickstep, Rumba, Samba, Tango and Waltz.

Geoff Newell, of Geoff and Maddie Dance, didn’t grow up dancing, and in fact he thought for a long time that dancing was something he just couldn’t do. He understands how stepping onto a dance floor and trying to move well in front of strangers is scary. But now, he and his partner Madeleine Konzelman, are experienced competitors and teachers. The two provide a relaxing and comfortable learning environment, with easy-to-understand training, and a great introductory course that covers the basics.

Unstrictly Ballroom, at DanceFX, also has a Ballroom Sampler, where you can try a variety of the dances that make up Ballroom. Natalie Cox, the instructor, is also Artistic Director of UGA’s Ballroom Performance Group.

Events

Geoff and Maddie Dance Ballroom Introductory Course

Three half-hour private lessons, \$50

Unstrictly Ballroom

Intermediate Ballroom, Sunday, 2 p.m.

Beginner Ballroom Sampler, 3 p.m.

DanceFX; 396 Foundry Street, Athens

Big Band Athens Social Dances

Once per month on 4th Thursday at 8 p.m.

Hendershot’s; 237 Prince Ave. \$10

Stay in the Know!

Geoff and Maddie Dance, 706-452-5909

Gmdance.com; info@gmdance.com

Unstrictlyballroom.com/class-schedule

706-355-3078; Natalie@dancefx.org

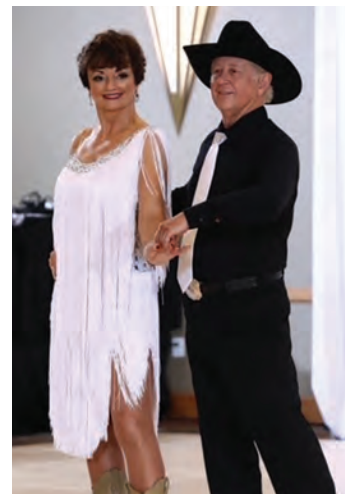
Competitive Dancing

Ron Putman is a professional instructor and a competitive dancer. So if you want to get serious about your dancing, Ron is the man for you. When Ron was in his 40s his wife made him take dancing lessons and after a lot of work, a successful businessman found himself one of the best-known and most successful dancers and instructors in Athens.

He can Swing, he can ChaCha, he can Tango, he can Two Step (I took a class or two); he does it all. He also dances at competitions around the country. These are not small events; a recent competition in Nashville had over 3,300 entries.

Ron himself continues to take instruction because, as he says, “Dance is not something you can learn in just one lesson,” or in a lifetime. And while beginner classes will get you started, if you want to take your dancing to the next level Ron suggests finding some friends and taking a small group class, where the instructor can work with each of you individually.

While Ron suspended his classes during the pandemic, beginning this month, he is back and will begin teaching a group class of West and East Coast swing on Thursdays at the Moose Lodge.



Ron Putman and Joy Whiteside win awards.

Events

East and West Coast Swing

Thursdays 6 p.m. (Food); 7:30 (Band)

The Moose Lodge

185 Ben Burton Rd., \$10

Facebook.com/ron.putman.12

Ronputman.com; 706-540-2779

I know I may have left out a favorite but if you have a band, event, or venue you want to share, go to this article online at boomathens.com and let us and our readers know in the Comments section.

Dancing is great for your brain, your body, and your social life so come on, get out there!! You know you want to! ■