

The Sport of Dance by Andrea Hartley



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The mere mention of the words, “Let’s go dancing tonight, honey,” sends shivers up many masculine spines. He would much rather go to a sporting event or watch one on television. But wait, guys, maybe there is something that you have overlooked!

Think football. Players are assigned specific roles, follow designed plays, and move to certain spots, sometimes using a pre-determined route to get there. Now, think dance. Isn’t the approach the same, with hopefully less violent interactions?

Lynn Swann, former Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver who was MVP of the Super Bowl in 1976 and a Pro Football Hall of Famer since 2001, says that it was dancing that made him a superb athlete. Swann studied ballet, modern dance and tap from the age of four until his senior year in high school.



Shana Vitoff (right), dance instructor and owner of Society Hill Dance Academy in Philadelphia; “People no longer laugh when I refer to dancing as a sport as they did 15 years ago.”

Shana Vitoff, a dance instructor and owner of Society Hill Dance Academy in Philadelphia, believes dancing is a sport. “It takes teamwork, coordination, balance, footwork, and strength,” she said. “People no longer laugh when I refer to dancing as a sport, like they did 15 years ago. *Dancing with the Stars* has made people more aware.”

One of Shana’s dance students, Alexander Kazmarck, 65, a successful businessman from Linwood, NJ, discovered the benefits of ballroom dancing about 15 years ago. “It’s great exercise and a great way to meet people. You can learn more about a woman after dancing the rumba with her than you can in 4 or 5 dates,” he said.

Kazmarck, who recently served as a dance host aboard the Queen Mary cruise ship, was not always so self-assured. “I didn’t have much rhythm, it took me years to learn how to dance to the beat,” he said. “Shana is a great instructor; she’s patient and knows how to put you at ease.”

“People aren’t born with the knowledge of how to dance,” Shana said. “Men like to be good at what they do, so it’s kind of scary to them at first. But they need to remember that they aren’t expected to just know how to do it.”

Kazmarck says a man who is able to dance will find friends anywhere he travels. “Look up a dance studio and find out when the parties are. They will welcome you with open arms,” he said. “Nothing beats dancing as a way to make connections. I used to take lessons in Philadelphia across from a gym. I would see the guys going in the gym and I’d think, ‘Maybe they are going to work out for an hour with weights.’ I’ve got it right because I’m going to get my hour of exercise dancing with a pretty lady, and I’m learning a skill that will benefit my social life.”

Jonathan Joyce, 29, of King of Prussia, PA started dancing lessons so he could dance at a friend’s wedding and found that it was harder than he thought, but he decided to stick with it. “I would say to any guy who thinks that dancing is not masculine that they hold a poorly thought-out position. After all, what other sport allows you to hold a woman close that you barely know without getting slapped?”



Ericksen

Julia Ericksen, Temple University sociology professor, says ballroom dancing promises instant intimacy. “The (dance) studio is a warm, intimate place where people can feel instantly connected. Everything is organized around people having a pleasant emotional experience,” she said. She feels this is important because people don’t have enough time in our modern society to establish relationships.

“People don’t feel as connected to each other as they used to, and often they don’t want to take a lot of time to develop a relationship. They have demanding jobs and other things to do,” Ericksen said. The usual rules about intimacy differ in the dance studio from other social settings. “There’s a lot of hugging and kissing going on. I once saw a sign in a dance studio which read, ‘Sexual harassment will not be reported, but it will be evaluated’.”

Ericksen shares more of her research and experience in her book, “Dance with Me: Ballroom Dance and the Promise of Instant Intimacy.”

Kazmarck knows that many men who come to a dance studio for the first time are outside their comfort zone, and he plans to do something about that. He is planning to open an upscale dance studio above a fitness facility in Somers Point, NJ. The Trocadero dance studio will have a social lounge that he hopes students will make their home away from home. "Singles can meet in a comfortable, safe environment. They can just come in and talk, make friends," Kazmarck said. "They can also learn the basic cha-cha or salsa dance steps while they burn off 600 calories."

The Trocadero, expected to open in June, will be hosting events for singles on alternate Sundays and will be open to the public on Saturdays for ballroom dancing. Lessons will include Ballroom, Latin, Ballet, Jazz, Tap, Belly and Western. Fitness classes will include Zumba and Pole Dancing.