

# dANCE

EVERYBODY

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BY Barb Berggoetz PHOTOGRAPHY BY Shannon Zahnle

The verve and exhilaration of dance attracts people of all ages, as does the sense of community, the sheer pleasure of moving to music, and the physical closeness. In the process, people learn more about themselves, break down inhibitions, stimulate their minds, and find new friends.

This is what dance in Bloomington is all about.

It is not about becoming Ginger Rogers or Fred Astaire.

"It's getting out and enjoying dancing and having a good time," says Thuy Bogart, who teaches Argentine tango. "That's so much more important for us."

The benefits of dancing on an individual level can be life altering — if you can get past

the fear of putting yourself out there, says Barbara Leininger, owner of Bloomington's Arthur Murray Dance Studio. "That very first step of coming into the studio is sometimes a frightening thing."

Leininger has witnessed what learning to dance can do for a bashful teenager; for a man who thinks he has two left feet; for empty nesters searching for a new adventure.

"It can change relationships," she says. "It can help people overcome shyness and give people a new lease on life. People get healthier physically, mentally, and emotionally. And they have a skill they can go out and have fun with and use for the rest of their lives."

Mary Hoedeman Caniaris  
and Tom Slater swing  
dance at a Panache  
Dance showcase.  
Photo by Annalese  
Poorman



## BALLROOM DANCING

When Benjamin and Meredith Wendell saw the empty nest looming in 2000, they wanted to find something new to do together. The couple liked cruises and saw people dancing poolside. They tried joining in, but Benjamin wanted to do it right. So, they went to Bloomington's Arthur Murray Dance Studio, which teaches ballroom and social dances to teenagers, 90-year-olds, and everyone in between.

"I will never forget our first lesson," recalls Meredith. "We were addicted almost immediately."

Fifteen years later, the couple's schedule is packed five nights a week with lessons, group classes, and dance parties. Both, now 61, say they enjoy lots of ballroom dances, including foxtrot, waltz, cha-cha, swing, bolero, tango, and particularly rumba and hustle.

For Meredith, dancing is her main source of exercise. She says it has improved her posture, coordination, grace, and balance. Benjamin gets his exercise through dancing and workouts at the Monroe County YMCA. They both love socializing with their "dance friends" and even have parties at home in their "dance room."

"It's really important to keep busy and keep the gears going," says Meredith. "You can do this forever."

Barbara Leininger, owner of Bloomington's Arthur Murray Dance Studio, says there are many people like the Wendells with little previous experience who develop a love of dance that becomes a big part of their lives. Others just want lessons so they can dance at weddings or other social events.

The popularity of dances, she says, ebbs and flows with influences including movies, TV shows such as *Dancing with the Stars*, and music. Among ballroom dances, mainstays are foxtrot, waltz, and swing — particularly East Coast swing (see next page), she says. Latin-style dances, such as salsa, are also considered ballroom dances.

Leininger explains to newcomers that it's not difficult to master the basic five foot movements — forward, backward, side-to-side, march, and rock. It's a matter of putting the movements into basic patterns.

"It should be fun," Leininger stresses, "and an opportunity to celebrate music, hold someone in your arms, and have that experience of moving on the dance floor as one."

**Benjamin and Meredith Wendell, passionate ballroom dancers, are out five nights a week at lessons, group classes, and parties.**



Originally called the Lindy Hop, swing dance has branched into East Coast and West Coast styles.

## SWING DANCING

If you go to weddings or frequent local dance clubs, swing dance is one of the best dances to know.

"Swing music is the most common type of music in the U.S.," says Sandy Messner of Panache Dance, who teaches Latin and ballroom dance classes — including swing — at Windfall Dancers and The Lodge. "It's so useful to know when going out."

Originally called the Lindy Hop, the dance emerged in the 1920s and later branched into East Coast and West Coast swings, each with different characters and music. East Coast swing is mainly a circular dance typically done to big band and jazz music. West Coast swing is more upright, usually somewhat slower, and done to rhythm and blues or early slow rock.

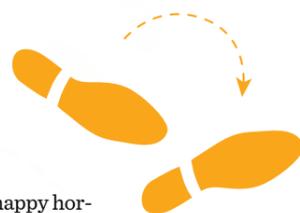
Swing, and dance in general, Messner says, is an excellent activity for people who want to develop a social network and find other active adults.

And she says anyone can learn to dance.

"I've never met a person I couldn't teach to dance. A lot of dancing is practicing, over and over. You develop muscle memory."

Learning dance steps challenges your brain and body, says Mary Hoedeman Coniaris, a 34-year instructor who teaches ballroom and social dance at Indiana University and West Coast swing and salsa at The Lodge. Many studies show the combination of

## TANGO



Dancing the tango creates "happy hormones," jokes Thuy Bogart, who teaches tango at Windfall Dancers.

"There is a lot of handholding and closeness, hugging," she says. "That's one of the reasons people stay with tango."

While tango isn't as mainstream in Bloomington as swing or salsa, she says it's still popular. Bogart, whose husband, Ben, performs professionally with a traveling tango orchestra, welcomes beginners and stresses they don't need to come with partners, nor do they need experience.

She likens Argentine tango to a free-flowing conversation that changes with each dance partner and includes improvised moves in response to one's partner's moves.

**Amaury de Siqueira, Argentine tango instructor, dances with Elise Boruvka. Note the men to the left duplicating his steps.**

"It can be vigorous, physically demanding," Bogart cautions, "but it's more like taking a Pilates class, not running a marathon."

In 2006, Amaury de Siqueira founded the Bloomington Argentine Tango Organization, a nonprofit cultural group with about 50 members. It spreads Argentine tango's musical and dance traditions through twice-a-week classes and monthly milongas (social dances) at The Lodge.

"In eight years, we've taught tango to a lot of different folks," says de Siqueira, a volunteer whose day job is assistant director of online education for the Indiana University School of Public Health. "I want the community to grow together."

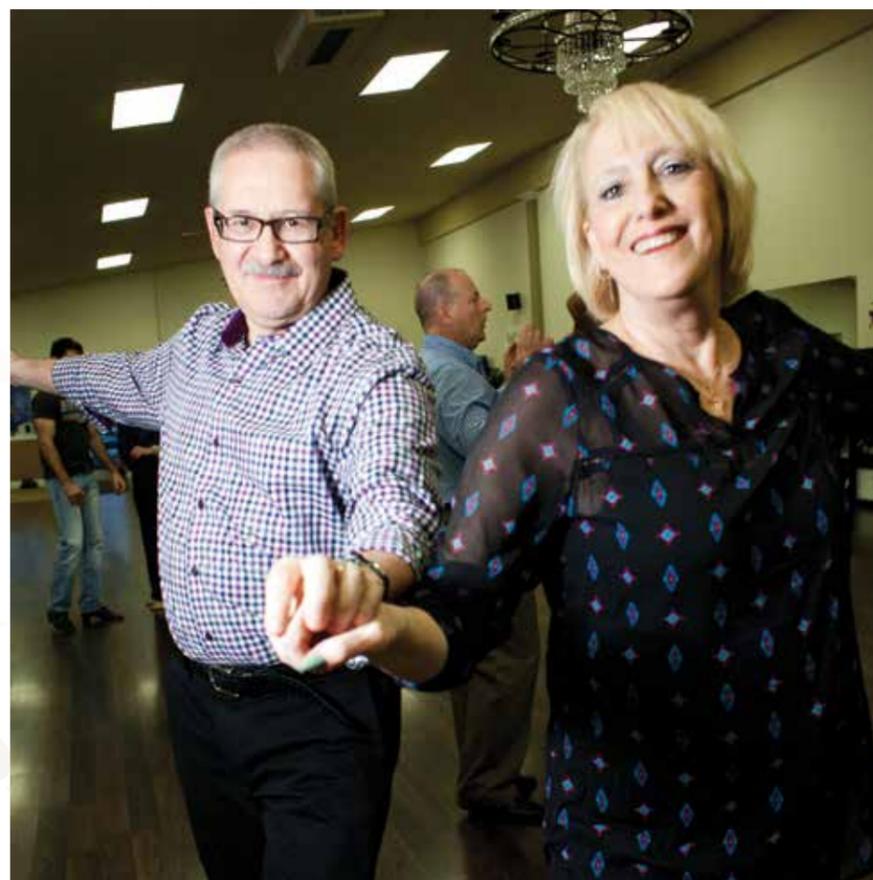
Elise Boruvka, 26, who fell in love with the tango community, likes that the dance is broken down into fundamentals but doesn't follow specific patterns.

"You have to work closely with your partner and learn his moves," says Boruvka. "It's all about how you interpret the music, but it doesn't mean it has to be complex."

Mia Dalglisch says tango has made her a better person.

"It asks for honesty, tenderness, assertiveness, and to truly be present in the moment with the person you are with," says Dalglisch, an art curator and former tango teacher in Bloomington. Those traits are applicable to the larger world, says Dalglisch, who now teaches in Boston, Massachusetts.

"You learn so much about yourself and about other people," she says, "if you are open to it."



SWING, CONTINUED.

music, moving, and holding someone all create benefits, she says.

Another avenue to learn swing is with the Indiana University Swing Dance Club. Students and community residents are welcome to take lessons on campus, attend social dances, and become members.

“I had no dance experience and two left feet,” recalls Chris Miller, club president. “It has done wonderful things for me personally and for my confidence level. It’s not something I can imagine giving up now.”



Sandy Messner of Panache Dance (left, foreground) teaches salsa to a student.



(left) Danny Weddle swings his dance partner, Megan Smith. People have been contra dancing Wednesday evenings at Harmony School for the past 45 years. (below) Live music and caller Tamara Loewenthal lead the dancers.



## SALSA AND LATIN DANCING

Salsa is sultry, physical, and all the rage. “It’s extremely popular right now, especially among young people,” says Sandy Messner of Panache Dance.

Compared to other ballroom dances, Latin dances are generally faster paced, more sensual, and have more rhythmic expression. Partners often dance in a closed, tight position, sometimes holding just one hand.

Latin dance is known for its rolling hip action and playful movements, making the various dances entertaining to do and watch. Learning Latin dances is fairly easy, many say, as most of the dances are made up of the same basic footsteps.

“While it’s more popular among people 40 and younger, you can see people into their 80s doing salsa,” says Barbara

Leininger, owner of the local Arthur Murray Dance Studio.

The fundamental Latin dances seen at dance clubs are salsa, merengue, and bachata, she says. Others are mambo, rumba, cha-cha, and samba.

“The influx of more and more Latin people in the United States brings their music and dancing into the culture,” says Leininger. “Latin music is very fun and energetic. Music is driving the dance styles.”

Dance instructors cite two other places that hold events where people can do Latin dances — Serendipity Martini Bar and The Lodge. Ritmos Latinos Indiana, an Indiana University-affiliated group, teaches and performs rueda de casino, a social form of Cuban salsa.

## CONTRA DANCING

It doesn’t matter if there’s three feet of snow on the ground or if it’s New Year’s Eve. If it’s a Wednesday night, contra devotees gather to swing their partners to live old-time string music, sometimes with a little Celtic fiddle added for good measure.

“We’ve been meeting every Wednesday for more than 2,000 weeks,” says Randy Hammond, board coordinator for the Bloomington Old-Time Music & Dance Group. “It’s a good chance for people to talk

to others and for socializing with the opposite sex.”

For 30 years, Hammond has been contra dancing with the group, which has been around for the past 45 years. Every Wednesday, 30 to 60 people come out to Harmony School (Boys and Girls Clubs of Bloomington in July and August), many of whom are longtime dancers. Hammond is trying to get more new people and college students to join them, stressing that beginner lessons are taught before the two hours of dancing begins. The group also sponsors occasional

Saturday dances and dance weekends twice annually.

Contra dancing, which stemmed from English country dance, is similar to square dancing in some ways, including having a caller guide the sequences. But Hammond says contra is more active and has less sitting out time.

Hammond, who also partakes in ballroom, Latin, swing, and Argentine tango, contends contra is the easiest. But even experienced dancers make mistakes now and then.

“Everybody messes up,” he says. “Some of the most fun I’ve had at contra dancing is when everybody is messing up.”

David Ernst, a 20-year regular at Harmony, is involved with contra on many levels. He also calls dances, writes some of them, and plays tenor banjo for others. And he met his wife, Priscilla Borges, there.

“It’s really nice to get together with the same group of people each week,” he says.



Belly dancers (l-r) Donna Carlton, Thalia, and Amber Grover.

## BELLY DANCING

No, you don't have to be supple and shapely to be a belly dancer.

"It's very accepting of different body types," says belly dance instructor Donna Carlton, who teaches at Harmony School on Thursday evenings and a course at Indiana University for credit. "You don't have to be a great athlete or in super fantastic shape to start."

To Carlton, belly dancing is a form of self-expression — a creative way to inter-

pret music with flowing patterns of movement.

"It's like a practice similar to yoga for me," says Carlton, who has taught since 1989. "When I'm dancing, I'm very in the moment, so it helps me feel centered and grounded. I don't think about my problems."

Novices shouldn't be intimidated. Her classes start with basic movements, then combine them and progress to building longer sequences. Some dances are choreographed, others improvised, and some are both.

While she has had a few men in her classes, most participants are women in their 30s and older. Many are drawn to belly dancing because it doesn't require a partner. Some, like Carlton, are attracted by the camaraderie with other women. Still, others say they just want to try something different or see it as a fun way to exercise.

"You can break a sweat," says Carlton. "It can help to relieve tension in the back. You'll learn about different muscles you didn't isolate or control before."

Belly dancing is the main source of exercise for Emilie Johnson, one of Carlton's students. A belly dancer for 11 years, she says it improves her core strength, and the back pain from which she used to suffer has gone away. Johnson performs publicly in Carlton's dance troupe.

She bristles at the suggestion that belly dancing can be degrading to women or that some are too old or overweight to do it.

"It's more about body empowering," says Johnson. "It doesn't matter how you look. It's how you dance."

## FOLK DANCING



Folk dances range from simple to complex. Many dances depict traditions — such as singing lullabies to babies — from the countries where they originate.

Locally, anyone can experience a variety of folk dances for free at several sites.

Longtime instructor Bob Pierson says all are welcome to come to weekly classes he runs at the Twin Lakes Recreation Center and Bell Trace Health and Living Community.

"Many of the dances are in lines or circles without partners," says the 81-year-old volunteer teacher. "We do everything from slow to rather fast dances. I break it down step by step and walk dancers through the dance before putting on the music."

Pierson leans heavily toward Eastern European, Polish, and Greek dances at local events, which attract around 20 people of all ages.

"It's a wonderful social and cultural thing," says Pierson, who also taught ballroom and other dances for 65 years.

Another outlet for folk dancing is through Indiana University International Folkdancers, a recreational group that meets Friday nights at different campus locations. Free instruction is offered to all comers for the first hour, followed by dance requests for one to two hours.

"If dancing threatens you, this is the place for you," says Leah Savion, a group organizer and IU professor of philosophy and cognitive science. "It's such a low-key, welcoming group. We start from very basic instruction and go to highly complicated dances."

Savion, who has participated with the group for 26 years, says many different styles of folk dance exist.

"They're all distinct," she says. "You can dance for years and still keep learning."

**"Many of the dances are in lines or circles without partners," says instructor Bob Pierson. Photo by Darryl Smith**



## BLUES DANCING

It's clear Josh Davis, 31, is a blues dance disciple. "It's a ton of fun," he says, of dances named funky butt, squat, and fishtail, which all fall under the umbrella term "blues dance."

Dating back more than 100 years, the dances grew up alongside blues music with influences from West Africa blending with the new blues styles in New Orleans.

Davis, who works as a technical support rep for a web-hosting firm, has been spreading the good word about blues dancing ever since it grew out of the local swing dance movement some five years ago.

He describes blues dancing as less systematic than ballroom dancing and says it compares most closely with informal jazz dance. "You can make it as difficult as you want, but not all the dances are terribly demanding," Davis says.

Davis discovered blues dancing at the Indiana University Swing Dance Club. He started taking it seriously and traveled to blues dance workshops around the Midwest.

For three semesters starting in 2013, he taught at the IU Swing Club, and, since June 2014, he has been teaching weekly drop-in classes at The Players Pub on Tuesday nights.

"Everybody is welcome, and I would love to see some new people check it out," he says.

He also belongs to the Indiana Blues Cooperative, a small group of enthusiasts interested in spreading blues dancing through workshops, a Facebook page, and informal classes.

"The blues dance community I am part of," he says, "isn't about reconstructing the past so much as having a good time while honoring the artistry of those who have come before."

Josh Davis and Stepanka Korytova dance to the blues at The Players Pub.



Hip-hop dancers (l-r) Catherine Barker, Erin Meacham, and Jamie Tartell.

## HIP-HOP DANCING

To Erin Meacham, hip-hop is unlike any other dance.

"You can make it your own and add your own style. That's why I like it so much," says Erin, 14, a freshman at Bloomington High School North.

She has already taken three years of hip-hop lessons at Windfall Dancers, after previously studying ballet and tap. She also is now taking modern dance and musical theater at Windfall and performing in Syncopation, a local, award-winning show choir.

She's so enamored with the art form that she already has her eye on a career in hip-hop or modern dance.

"Honestly," she says, "hip-hop just makes me happy."

Erin's teacher, Brennan Wilder, recognizes that hip-hop is not for everyone. For instance, if someone doesn't like strength training, she says, this may not be the class to take. She's not trying to scare anyone, she says, just better prepare them.

"But people would be surprised how much they could do," says Wilder, a professional hip-hop dancer and show choir choreographer. "You don't have to have years of ballet or anything else. You can come in cold turkey and try it."

Once Wilder discovered hip-hop in Los Angeles, she became a huge fan and has been teaching it for 14 years, including four years at Windfall.

While the roots of hip-hop music come from reggae and rap, hip-hop dance moves are influenced by African dance and gymnastics more than anything else, Wilder notes.



Erin (left), who hopes to have a career as a hip-hop or modern dancer, practices a move with instructor Brennan Wilder.

While it's a very energetic form of dance set to fast-paced music, Wilder urges clients to feel okay about whatever skill level they attain.

"I tell them, 'If you can't do a move, modify it,'" she says. "It's more about moving together."

# DO IT!



## So you want to dance?

*Here's where to take lessons and go dancing in Bloomington.*

**Arthur Murray Dance Studio**, [bloomingtonarthurmurray.com](http://bloomingtonarthurmurray.com), ballroom, social, and Latin dancing; Barbara Leininger, owner, 812-334-0553.

**Panache Dance**, [panachedance.com](http://panachedance.com), ballroom, nightclub, and Latin dancing at Windfall Dancers and The Lodge; Sandy Messner, owner, 812-219-5869.

**Bloomington Argentine Tango Organization (BATO)**, [bloomington-tango.net](http://bloomington-tango.net), tango classes and milongas (social dances) at The Lodge; Amaury de Siqueira, advisor, 805-895-1644.

**Argentine tango**, Thuy Bogart, teacher, classes at Windfall Dancers, [thuy.ashtango@gmail.com](mailto:thuy.ashtango@gmail.com), 812-340-6726.

**Windfall Dancers**, [windfalldancers.wordpress.com](http://windfalldancers.wordpress.com), ballet, tap, hip-hop, creative movement lessons; Kay Olges, board president, 812-334-0506.

**West Coast swing**, Mary Hoedeman Coniaris, instructor, swing and salsa at The Lodge, [mhoedeman@att.net](mailto:mhoedeman@att.net), 812-322-1603.

**Indiana University Swing Dance Club**, [indiana.edu/~iuswing](http://indiana.edu/~iuswing), East and West Coast swing and Lindy Hop classes at Indiana Memorial Union and the IU Wildermuth Intramural Center and social dances at several venues; Chris Miller, president, [cjm3@indiana.edu](mailto:cjm3@indiana.edu).

**Ritmos Latinos Indiana**, [ritmosindy.com](http://ritmosindy.com), teaches and performs rueda de casino (social form of Cuban salsa) and open Latin dancing at Indiana Memorial Union and The Lodge; [ritmosindy@gmail.com](mailto:ritmosindy@gmail.com).

**Bloomington Old-Time Music & Dance Group**, [bloomingtoncontra.org](http://bloomingtoncontra.org), contra and square dancing lessons and social dances at Harmony School (Boys & Girls Clubs in July–August); Randy Hammond, board coordinator, 812-272-8081.

**International folk dancing**, Bob Pierson, instructor, classes at Twin Lakes Recreation Center, 812-349-3720, and Bell Trace Health and Living Community, 812-323-2858; Pierson, 812-333-3482.

**IU International Folkdancers**, [indiana.edu/~folkdanc](http://indiana.edu/~folkdanc), free instruction and folk dances, Indiana Memorial Union and other campus sites, Andrea Morrison, group contact, 812-333-1550.

**Belly dancing**, Donna Carlton, instructor, classes at Harmony School, [allaboutbellydance.com](http://allaboutbellydance.com), 812-330-1831.

**Blues dancing**, Josh Davis, instructor, classes at The Players Pub, [theplayer-spud.com](http://theplayer-spud.com), 812-334-2080; Davis, 417-812-5837, [joshdavisblues@gmail.com](mailto:joshdavisblues@gmail.com) or visit [facebook.com/JoshDavisBlues](http://facebook.com/JoshDavisBlues).

**Hip-hop**, Brennan Wilder, instructor, lessons at Windfall Dancers, [bloomingtonbeat@gmail.com](mailto:bloomingtonbeat@gmail.com), 812-334-0506.