

History of Ballroom Dance

Ballroom dancing conjures up images of beautiful women in flowing gowns and tall dark handsome men in tuxes waltzing their way around the dance floor. Ballroom dance is not just the Waltz. Ballroom dance can be elegant and sophisticated (like the Waltz) but it can also be hot, sultry and sexy (like the Tango or Paso Doble), or a good bit of lively fun (like the Fox Trot Jive or Quick Step).

Webster defines ballroom dancing as simply "Any of various, usually social dances in which couples perform set moves". The word "ball", when referring to a social gathering as opposed to a child's toy, comes from the Latin "ballare" meaning to dance. This is the base for ballroom (a room for dancing), ballet (a dance), and ballerina (a dancer).

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries ballroom dancing was very popular among the upper classes of England. It didn't really catch on with the working class until the late 19th and early 20th century. In the early 1920's competitive ballroom dancing was gaining popularity so the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (formerly known as The Imperial Society of Dance Teachers) formed a Ballroom Branch whose function was to standardize the ballroom dances.

Modern ballroom dancing revolves around five dances, the Modern Waltz, the Viennese Waltz, the Slow Foxtrot, Tango and the Quickstep. The Latin American ballroom dances are the Samba, Rumba, Paso Doble, Cha-Cha and the Jive. Latin American ballroom is short for Latin and American - not a reference to Latin countries. .

The modern ballroom dances vary in tempo (beats per minute) and rhythm (structure); however, they all involve a couple dancing in a closed hold. A closed hold involves 5 bodily points of contact between the couple. Three of these points involve the hands, his left hand holding her right, her left hand on top of his right upper arm (for the Tango her hand would go behind his arm) and his right hand on her back resting on her left shoulder blade. The other two points of contact are her left elbow resting on his right elbow and the right side of her chest touching the right side of his chest. This dance posture goes all the way back to the ballroom dancing in the European royal courts and makes for a very elegant look as the couples float around the dance floor.

This right side-to-right side contact of the closed hold may have originated from a time when men danced while wearing their swords, which were hung on their left sides. This would also explain the counter clockwise movement around the dance floor as the man would've stood on the inside of the circle so he wouldn't

inadvertently hit any of the people watching the dancers with his sword as he danced past.

In Latin American ballroom the postures vary from dance to dance with some using the closed hold and others where the partners hold each other with only one hand.

Like the Modern Ballroom the Latin American Ballroom has been standardized for teaching purposes and has a set, internationally recognized vocabulary, technique, rhythm and tempo.