

Ballroom Dancing and the Movies

Hollywood has always had a love affair with dancing. That includes everything from Ballroom dancing to break dancing. Great music combined with talented dancers and flamboyant costumes makes for a hit whether it's Standard Ballroom dancing, Latin American dance, jazz or disco

In some movies the ballroom dancing comprises just a scene or two as in with *Gone With the Wind*, when Rhett bids for the honor of dancing the Virginia Reel with Scarlett or in *The Shining* when the hotel ghosts dance the night away in the grand ballroom.

For other movies the ballroom dancing is the basis of the story as in *Shall We Dance*, a Richard Gere, Jennifer Lopez film about a family man who signs up for ballroom dance lessons in the hope of meeting the beautiful woman he has seen through the window of the dance studio on his commute home each night. He ends up truly falling in love with the dancing and finds himself having to do some fancy juggling to not let his secret out to his wife and co-workers as he trains for Chicago's biggest ballroom dance competition.

Strictly Wonderful is a romantic comedy about a rebellious ballroom dancer who pairs up with an amateur to practice for a big ballroom competition. This film received a 15-minute standing ovation when it played at the Cannes Film Festival.

The movie *Dance With Me*, is the story of a young Cuban, Rafael, who comes to America after the death of his mother where he meets his father who runs a dance studio. As fate would have it Rafael turns out to be a great dancer and becomes his father's best hope of winning a championship for his studio. The thing that makes this movie truly unique is that it is one of only a few movies that actually used ballroom competitors making for wonderfully realistic ballroom dance scenes.

Dance, ballroom or otherwise has played a large part in hundreds of movies. The Sharks and the Jets danced their way through *West Side Story*, Jennifer Grey and Patrick Swayze put *Dirty Dancing* on the map. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers awed the world with the beauty and grace of their dancing. There was even a joke at one time that Ginger Rogers should have gotten top billing since she did everything Fred Astaire did and she did it backwards in high heels! In 1935 Shirley Temple tapped her way through *The Little Colonel* with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and in 1939 after Judy Garland watched dozens of "munchkins" dance and sing to celebrate the wicked witches demise she joined with the scarecrow, tin man and lion and they danced their way to the land of Oz.. In 1983 *Flashdance*

put the exotic in exotic dancing and 2004 saw the animated characters of Shrek dance the night away.

Ballroom dancing is exciting to watch in person and enjoyable to watch on television, however the big screen brings an added dimension to the grace, romance and passion that is ballroom dancing.