

Ballroom Dancing - The Handicapped and the Disabled

Dancing is good for your overall health, for weight loss and for mental relaxation. Everyone loves to dance, including those people who just happen to be blind, deaf, missing limbs or confined to a wheelchair. Many groups have formed classes to teach these people ballroom, line dances, jazz ballet and anything else they may want to learn.

The Malta Wheelchair Dancesport Association is one of those groups. Wheelchair dancing had been practiced in parts of the world since the 1970's but wasn't started in Malta until 1999. The group holds classes to teach dance to disabled people using a format very similar to that used to teach non-disabled people. The classes are open to people who just want to learn to dance and those who want to dance competitively.

When it comes to the competitive dances there are two groups, Combi (one partner is in a wheelchair the other is not) or Duo (both parties are in wheelchairs). They learn all the Standard Ballroom dances and the Latin American Ballroom dances. For those who are just interested in social dancing they offer courses for line and solo dances.

Wheelchair dancers use their upper bodies and arms to perform the same movements in the same manner as non-disabled dancers. Also, no different from non-disabled dancers, some are good and some aren't but ALL dance because they love it. The dance classes have the added benefit of teaching both the wheelchair users and their helpers more and better uses of their chairs encouraging them to become more independent

The Gallaudet Dance Company is comprised of about 15 students all of whom are deaf or hard of hearing. Gallaudet is the worlds only accredited Liberal Arts University for the hearing impaired. The dancers rely on many things using their vision and sign language to communicate.

For years hearing people have bought into the theory that the deaf "hear" by feeling vibrations through the floor. Although that may work when standing still on a surface that will conduct the vibrations it wouldn't do much good when you are moving, jumping, or standing on a concrete floor. The Gallaudet Dancers practice for hours on end to develop an inner sense of the timing for each dance. This is accomplished in part by watching an instructors counting out the rhythm of the dance. The instructor will give a sign for each step in much the same way hearing dancers will get a vocal count from their instructor.

Deaf and hearing-impaired dance students work had to remain "in time" with or

without music. The most important things for teaching these students to dance are a visual count, high quality sound systems and use of sign language.

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Hundreds of viewers watched fascinated as Heather Mills competed for several weeks on Dancing with the Stars with one prosthetic leg. Not only was it difficult to tell which leg it was most of the time but she performed some high difficulty moves that the other dancers didn't even attempt!