

## History of Ballroom Dancing

Until recently, most people haven't thought much of ballroom dancing. It has become a popular worldwide pastime, thanks to the media bringing it back into the spotlight with shows like "Dancing with the Stars." It wasn't long after the first season that the dance craze soon swept over America, with more and more people choosing to learn to dance. However, ballroom dancing is certainly nothing new and has quite an extensive background.

Let's start by discussing the meaning behind the word "ballroom". In simple theory, it means a place where balls may be held. The English language adopted this term from the Latin word "ballare", meaning "to dance". Ironically, this also serves as a base for words like "ballerina" and "ballad". Ballrooms were a very popular source of entertainment before the days of cable television, internet, or satellite radio. Often couples would congregate here to socialize and dance with other couples, and it wasn't long before dance competitions gained popularity.

There are many different dances and versions of ballroom dancing. Each of these unique dances has specific steps and characteristics that make it different from other dances - but there is one aspect that remains constant throughout each style of dancing. No matter what dance style is being performed, you can bet they are being performed by a couple. Every ballroom dance involves a man and a woman, usually remaining in contact throughout the entire routine (although there are some ballroom dances where contact is broken, but the couple reunites by the dance's end). As common as it seems, this style of dancing was developed in Western Europe in the early 1600's. Dances were often held the evening prior to men going off to battle, as a way for the men to go off to war in good spirits.

Men often wore their swords while dancing with a woman and it is believed that this led to a woman placing her left hand on her partner's right shoulder, while grasping his left hand for additional balance. This is also where the concept of men leading on the dance floor was developed.

As time passed throughout the centuries, many styles of ballroom dancing were born. Each particular dance has its own history, but the Waltz and Foxtrot were the first to gain popularity in the realm of ballroom dancing. Dancing soon became a growing trend in several countries, and other styles of ballroom dancing were formed based on the various cultures. For example, the paso doble was developed in Spain in the 1700's to demonstrate bullfighter's agility and strength. In Italy, the mambo became a popular dance at weddings and special events, while the quickstep became the trend in America after World War I.

By the 1970's, all of these different dances had made their way to America's ballrooms and dance competitions soon became popular. Today, ballroom dancing is the number one form of dance among adults and is widely covered by the media. It is also now being offered as an alternative to physical education to high school and college students - a good indicator that ballroom dancing will remain a favorite activity for years to come.