



August 2009

August 2009 - Milwaukee Steppers and Ballroomers United

Volume 1, Issue 4

Special points of interest:

- Tuesday Night Steppin and Ballroom class at Garfield's 502
- [Milwaukee's Largest Stepping Competition is Back August 21 & 22, 2009](#)
- Remember the Pre-Party August 21st at Shakers
- Get your ticket this week for raffles and events (See an MSBU or Umoja Member)

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More on - Milwaukee's Largest Stepping!

It's August and Milwaukee's Largest Stepping Contest is back! This year, we will be giving away \$2,500 in cash prizes and contestants will have the opportunity to pre-qualify for the World's Largest to be held in Chicago, IL on Saturday, September 19. The contest weekend kicks off on Friday, August 21st with a pre-party and workshops. As a special treat and added bonus to the weekend, MSBU and UMOJA presents Detroit Ballroom and Line Dance workshops featuring Demetrius of World Class Dance Productions, Detroit, MI. After the workshops, DJ Shorty Smooth will be our musical host for the night, bringing us the best and latest music in town. This is a pre-party that you do not want to miss. Shaker's Lounge and Rooftop Patio is the place to

be Friday night in Milwaukee. Park 6 Lounge in Racine is the place to be for the main event... Milwaukee's Largest Stepping Contest. The one and only, Pete Frazier of the world famous Majestic Gents will be hosting the night's event. To top it off, Chicago's premier DJ, Mellow Khris will be our musical host for the evening so it's sure to be a blast. Contestants will be putting it down that night to qualify and win prize money. Get ready to entertain your feet and eyes, and experience Hot Fun in the Summer Time!



Etiquette Corner - Personal Space by Cynthia Robinson

Personal space is the boundary we each have around ourselves. We decide who can come closer and who should stay further away. You know your boundaries, but others' boundaries may be different. Understanding personal space in dance can be tricky.

There are combinations and moves that place you in close contact with your partner. To say that you prefer not to be close when dancing is defeating the natural interaction

that social dance brings.

Instead, try to recognize your partner's comfort zone, respect your partners spouse or mate during your dance (if knowledgeable of status), and respond appropriately when misunderstanding are brought to your attention. Dance is intimate; remember to respect yourself and respect your partner.



Response to Cynthia Wilson's "Down & Dirty"

This was a great article and very much the Cynthia I met some years ago while working for this group in a technical capacity. I think what I like most about this article is Cynthia's honesty and growth which is really what steppin is all about. There will always be those who doubt, attack, judge, discredit and otherwise that will get to us shake us up or even cause us to want to give up but at the end of the day the question will be. Did you stand, did you endure, did you accomplish, did you achieve and did it have a positive effect on others. MSBU stood, endured, accomplished, achieved and continue to have a positive effect on others just as many of us who supported each other stood through the years. I think about it every time I make a video, do a website and all the other stuff I do in a technical capacity. Each time, I see visions of people like Cynthia, Lisa MSBU and others which always motivates me to do my best and my greatest work. Thanks and God Bless you Cynthia.

Dan Land - Chicago
Steppersexpress.com

Response to Cynthia Wilson's "Down & Dirty"

Down and Dirty is what's up! Every group in Milwaukee has some thing to bring to the stepping community. MSBU brings it sexy. Lisa with those sexy strides, Cynthia W. confident looking as she slowly moves across the floor, Cynthia R's turns are smooth and appealing and Peter I'll just say, "that goatee is working for you man". I want to thank you for your opinion Cynthia W. (little momma). With help from M.S.B.U. and all of Milwaukee's stepping groups, I hope to be able to eventually dance good with any and everybody.

CeCe - Milwaukee

You can read more by going to www.msbu.net and selecting the Down and Dirty Link

The Dance - Fronting

Regardless of what is happening around you, you must be true to yourself. To continue enjoying this community, the person you have to know the most about is yourself. Some people will front to easily and immediately assimilate, or conform with others. This person often has an outward show of emotion or opinion with the hope of making an impression on others. Most people will say that person is cool and very seldom does this individual have to take a stand. In the case of some, they take a different stand depending on who is around. The cost of fronting is that it is a

denial of self and could damage genuine relationships in the long run.

Even if you know yourself perfectly, you may feel that the community will not value some parts of who you are. This may cause you to start fronting or hiding certain aspects of yourself. If you bring everything that you have which is true, you will feel much more respected and valued by those you interact with. After all, they are seeing the 'real' you. It is much

better to deal with an outspoken person who is genuine than a charming, appealing person who is not.



Picture is from the very 1st Milwaukee's Largest Steppin Contest

Dance as a Living Art Form: Chi-Town Steppin and Detroit Ballroom - *Marcus Dewitt*

Dance is a living art form. Unlike a museum or bookstore, unlike drama or poetry or fiction, unlike being an audience in a theater, dance is an encounter between real people. As both a communal art and also a form of individuation, life and art merge in the dance. People fall in love on the dance floor. Lost feelings are reawakened. Hearts are broken. Partners change. People build confidence and character through the dance. Some relationships exist only on the level of dance -- it can be a very romantic four minutes! -- and that is the only time they see one another. One dances with the heart and all of one's passion --and then the song is gone. Like a poet's melancholy, the reverberations remain.

The famous poet, philosopher and playwright Friedrich Schiller proclaimed the highest of all art forms to be not poetry, drama, or philosophy but -- dancing! In dance, the rhythmic pulse of the art is expressed through the whole body and the body is itself the canvas, the language, the clay. Dance is fantastic because it is alive, not a static form, not a recording or drawing or image but an existential art.

The poetic movement of dance has the ecstatic and spiritual transcendence that the highest of arts have and, as with all great art forms, it is sensuous, and merges spirit and body, earth and sky, with rhythm and grace.

Two passionate urban ballroom dance forms, Chi Town Steppin and Detroit Ballroom are alive and changing. Even now as we speak, someone's experimenting with a new dance move which may soon be incorporated into the dance.

Chi Town Steppin in its traditional form has a rhythmic movement that alternates between two sets of three steps and a two-step shuffle. The beat for steppin is based on the foot landing at the click of the snare drum, not the bass drum, and that makes it different from most dances. In an 8-count, the foot traditionally touches the floor on the beat for all eight steps, with the first, fourth, and seventh step landing precisely at the clap of the snare. Steppin has a beautiful undulation of movement that changes from the two types of three-step (one-two-three being one form, four-five-six being another) and the shuffle (seven-eight). Though there is also a six-count, people say this is just a different way to divide up the numbers; the dance is the same.

Detroit Ballroom is a kind of two-step, though cha cha can be incorporated in it. It looks different from steppin because it has no shuffle (no seven-eight) and smoothly flows as a continuum. In Detroit Ballroom the feet land on the bass drum, not the snare. The knee lifts at the snare and the foot lands on the bass. It is more elastic than steppin, since the beat can be faster than a steppin beat. Ballroomers move across the floor in an interweaving of what looks like slow dancing, spins that look a little like steppin, and classical ballroom moves (usually without the lifts). The dance is soulful and free-spirited, dignified, romantic, classy, a ladies' and gentlemen's dance. Like steppin, it has its own precision and carefulness of form.

These dances are beautiful and addictive. So is the whole culture of steppin and ballroom across the United States. Some people will only listen to "steppin music" -- primarily smooth jazz and R&B. The cultivation of an ear for what songs are good to step to, and what are good to ballroom to, are a part of the dance culture: sharing music, sharing the vibes, feeling and living the music, and giving expression to that music -- through dance.

There are legendary steppers who are great artists. There are up and coming steppers and ballroomers who surprise everyone with new moves and whole new ways of expressing dance. I've seen steppers come in sort of dumpy and end up stylin and fly because -- now they're steppers, so they gotta be "stepper sharp." You develop a style in dance and in dress that is a part of your persona in the steppin community. A sort of folklore emerges with all the stories about the steppers, memorable stepper sets, the contests, who learned from whom, the dance places that emerge and disappear, and narratives about the dances themselves.

Though anyone can participate in these dances, Chi Town Steppin and Detroit Ballroom are rooted in Black culture and

-Continued-

affirm the beauty and dignity of the people. Both dances have risen to the level of a fine art, like the classical dances of international ballroom, and stand as yet another one of the great achievements of Black artists in the United States. These dances affirm confidence, freedom, spirituality, strength, grace, and beauty.

Unlike classical dances such as the Waltz, people dance Chi Town Steppin and Detroit Ballroom in clubs and local dance halls to the latest music. Many of the steppers and ballroomers may work at developing their dance just about every night, just as dedicated musicians work daily at their craft, but there is a lot of joy in it and people let loose and have fun.

Both of these dances are continually evolving. Steppin evolved in Chicago out of Boppin and became its own form. Ballroom evolved out of cha-cha and Greystoning in Detroit and became its own form. Steppers continually train and retrain as the moves and styles keep changing. Steppin ten years ago was almost a different dance, but even over the past five years it has changed, and will continue to change over the years. Familiar moves that seemed a necessity for steppers like the shimmy, the extended right, even the shuffle in place for the seven-eight, are now giving way to other forms as the dance continually transforms.

Dance groups can be like family, where people look out for and care about each other. Steppers sets nearly always include a birthday dance. Steppin classes usually include a circle gathering with a prayer. And then there is the drive to help the Black community that belongs to the spirit of the steppers. Milwaukee Steppers and Ballroomers United (MSBU), for example, has yearly toy drives for the poor and raises funds for children with sickle cell anemia. In the wake of hurricane Katrina, Milwaukee steppin organizers Mykel and Deon Farr raised funds through the steppin community and brought people together to help the victims. Sistas in Sync and The Step and Think Pink Breast Cancer Awareness Foundation, drawing from the network of the stepping community, put together a school supply drive set for Friday, August 7, 2009 to raise money for school supplies for children of breast cancer survivors.

The lives of the people who step -- loved ones who have died, marriage celebrations, the heroism of the steppers who bring back awards for their dancing that bring pride to the city or dance group they step with-- all add to the feeling of a stepper's set. It's more than just dancing. Steppers show a deep love for Black culture and values, and the dance itself expresses this passionately, doing with the body --the feet to the beat--, what Langston Hughes could do with words.

--Marcus DeWitt (c) October 10, 2008, July 14, 2009

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**Promoting Milwaukee's Social
Dance Scene**

We are on the Web
www.msbu.net

MSBU is Milwaukee's premiere, social dance group. Offering Tuesday night dance class for Chicago Style Steppin and Detroit Club Style Ballroom. Workshops are available for groups wanting to bring a social dance to their community or for people trying to brush up on their skills

You can contact us by email at: dance@msbu.net

Milwaukee's Largest Contest Guidelines

Registration for entry is from 8pm – 10pm the evening of the event. There is no participation fee or pre-qualification phase. There are two categories: Original and Beginners.

Original Steppers

1. Open age category
2. No split
3. No dancing on your knees or on the floor
4. No prop's

Beginners

1. Open age category
2. Steppers who have been steppin for 1 year or less (applies to both partners)
3. Neither partner has competed in the World's Largest previous to this year
4. Neither partner can be an instructor
5. No props
6. No splits

There will need to be at least 5 couples registered for each category. If there are less than 5 couples the category will be eliminated.

Contestants will however have the opportunity to compete in the category that still exists if they fit within the criteria.

Payout for contestants is as follows: Original 1st Place \$1,000, 2nd Place \$500 and 3rd Place \$250. Beginners 1st Place \$500 and 2nd Place \$250.

No more than 3 couples will perform at a time to allow judges' adequate viewing space and time to assess and analyze skills.

Couples will dance to three continuous songs for a total of three minutes.

The competitors will accept the decision of the judges and the organizers as final and indisputable.

All participants are required to display good sportsmanship at all times, both on and off the competition floor.

In the event of a tie. Their will be a dance off.

Judging

Judging panel will be selected from a cross-section of experienced judges and accomplished dancers. Scoring for all contestants will be on a scale from 1 to 5 based on the following criteria in each category.

Rhythm and timing

The appropriate matching of body motion and footwork to the rhythm and beats of the music. Timing must be consistent throughout the demonstration.

Appearance

Attire should be steppers sharp! A form of Ragtime, black tie, and modern fashion designs twisted into a unique style of contemporary designs.

Couple Interaction

An appropriate and confident "lead/follow" or "action/reaction: between the partners is an expected part of competition dance. The attractive give-and-take of a couple dancing as a balanced partnership.

Technique

How well the competitors execute the movements comprising their dance constitutes technique. The evident ease and clean execution of the performance. Good technique demonstrates an intimate connection with the music as well as variety and contrast.

Originality/Creativity

How well the competitors create an atmosphere of excitement by inviting and generating interest in their performance. While showmanship is one aspect, it cannot and will not substitute for good dancing.