



BDTC trainees, including guest instructor Melissa Saphir (center), pose for the camera.

Ballroom Dance Teachers College Training Program

BY LEE ERICA ELDER

When Diane Jarmolow, former owner and director of San Francisco's Metronome Ballroom (one of the largest and most successful ballroom dance studios in the country, now a Cheryl Burke Dance studio), founded The Ballroom Dance Teachers College program in 1991, there was no vocational training available for ballroom dance teachers. Now, BDTC has built a template for dance teacher education that has served as a model for 40 programs throughout the United States, Canada, India and the Caribbean. "I don't want anyone looking back on their life and thinking, 'I had an OK career, but more than anything, I wish I could have danced,'" says Jarmolow.

And dance they do. Participants in the 16-month BDTC training program learn a massive vocabulary of ballroom styles: Argentine tango, bolero, cha cha, East and West Coast swing, foxtrot, hustle, lindy hop, merengue, mambo, nightclub two-step, rumba, salsa, samba, tango, Viennese waltz and traditional waltz. BDTC master teachers are trained in various disciplines and bring those skills to the classroom as well—for example, guest instructor Julie Lowe is a former principal ballerina

with the Oakland Ballet.

Each two-hour class typically begins with a homework presentation that analyzes various aspects of dance elements, such as understanding the open break and underarm turn in the rumba, or the follower's role as opposed to the leader's in the basic tango curving move. Teachers give feedback and review previous lessons before introducing new elements, such as foot and dance positions, alignment, rise and fall, amount of turn and footwork, among others. Participants will also gain important teaching skills, like vocal projection, selecting appropriate class music, rotating partners, selling dance lessons and communicating with customers.

And the rate of trainees actually using these learned skills in the field runs high. "One hundred percent of our graduates who want to teach ballroom become ballroom teachers," says Jarmolow. "Each of our graduates find their niche, whether it's in the public school system, at a retirement community, as a staff teacher at a studio, or as an independent teacher." **DT**

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PROGRAM STATISTICS

Prospective participants: "The goal and purpose of the program is to raise the standard of ballroom dance instruction and offer anyone with the dream of becoming a full-time teacher the opportunity to be trained thoroughly with all the tools necessary to succeed," says Ballroom Dance Teachers College Founder and Director Diane Jarmolow. "Trainees from all walks of life, ages, backgrounds, careers, ages, body types, etc., attend our program." (All trainees must be at least 18.)

Program length: The BDTC's 16-month program requires no previous experience and is divided into four monthlong quarters. Trainees may start at the beginning of January, May or September. The program can also be completed in eight months by taking the sections simultaneously at both locations (San Francisco and Emeryville, California). A full-time, four-month accelerated program is available for those with some ballroom experience.

Registration/housing: The 16-month program costs \$520 per month. This includes four hours of weekly training, general group ballroom classes, parties and open studio practice time. BDTC also offers one- to two-week certification intensives, custom-designed teacher training, management consulting and BDTC-in-a-Box (a tailored program to start a BDTC affiliate at your studio). Assistantship opportunities are available as well. Out-of-state trainees need to relocate. (BDTC will help find housing.)

Accreditation received: Trainees receive a certificate of completion for each quarter and a diploma after completing all four and a final exam. Professional certification is also available through member organizations of National Dance Council of America in Bronze, Silver and Gold for specific ballroom genres. (The BDTC 16-month program prepares trainees for these professional exams at the Bronze associate level.)

Director/founder: Diane Jarmolow began teaching in 1978 and has trained many ballroom professionals, including five-time U.S. Champions Victor Veyrasset and Heather Smith, U.S. Champion Olga Forapanova and current U.S. Smooth Finalists David and Valentina Weise. Jarmolow is a Dance Vision International Dance Association National Examiner and an adjudicator for DanceSport competitions. She is a 15-time winner of the "Top Teacher" award at national competitions.

Fun fact: A group of four BDTC graduates and other dancers started a dance collective in the San Francisco Bay Area, fusing ballroom with other styles of dance, including aerial, ballet, jazz, improv and musical theater.