

Off the floor ...



Dancing Partners

Whilst many people think that wriggling like a frightened worm is dancing, others know that holding your partner and moving together is quite blissful - and is real dancing. *



Our Sydney Instructors
Pat Wilcock and Robert Fletcher

Two stepping and partner dancing are two different styles of country dance.

Two stepping originated in North America and Canada and is probably the most widely known and performed country dance.

Like most 'country' dance, its roots have been traced to other forms of dance, and while some specifics cause great uproar among 'experts', very few will argue that what is known as the two step today is related to ballroom's fox trot.

Two stepping is done with a partner, in an anti-clockwise direction around the room. The steps are a continual pattern of *quick, quick, slow, slow*. It is only done to country music with a two step beat and the dancers make up their own routine.

The leader faces anti-clockwise and always starts moving forward on the left foot. The follower faces the leader and commences by moving backwards on the right foot.

It is the role of the leader to choreograph the dance while his partner follows. Whether the steps are forward turns, to the side, or in any direction, the pattern is always *quick, quick, slow, slow*. And each sequence of steps, movements or positions has a name, such as Basic, Sweetheart, Promenade, Cuddle or Around the World.

While **partner dancing** is also danced anti-clockwise, it is a choreographed dance made up of the same steps that we use in line dancing - shuffles, pivots, cha cha, waltz, etc. Partner dancing is generally not restricted to country music, but includes Latin and pop music.

Gordon Elliott and Tina Silvestro first taught two stepping and partner dancing at the Yagoona Greyhound Club, as did Lance Pritchard for a while. Eventually, Noel Bradey was invited to take over the class with Pam Ackary, and Robert and Pat were among their students. Then about six years ago, Noel asked Rob and Pat if they would like to run the classes.

Pat first saw two stepping at the DCM Nightclub, Darlinghurst and the Imperial Hotel, Erskineville, about 17 years ago. It was around the time that line dancing was just starting to take off in Sydney. "Both classes were conducted by the gay community and everybody was having such a great time, I just thought I want to do that," said Pat.

"I had just started line dancing with Michael and Noel at Strictly. They were holding classes with G.J. Lee at South Seniors' Leagues Club, Newtown and Noel decided to teach two stepping and partner dancing for half an hour before class.

"So that is where it all began for me. Before our Strictly socials we would also have half an hour of two stepping and partner dancing."

Robert was already attending Tina Silvestro's line dancing classes and he decided to join in.

"Having done ballroom before, dancing with a partner was a very comfortable and natural transition for me," said Robert.



Robert and Pat with some of their Yagoona students

The Yagoona Class

Classes are held once a month at the Yagoona Greyhound Club, Sydney, and a new dance is usually taught every second month.

"It does help if people have some knowledge of dance, whether it is ballroom, rock and roll or line dancing as most of the steps come from these dance styles."

Pat and Robert try to teach dances to the same music as popular line dances so they can join in at line dance socials. Some of their favourites are Galway Partners, Unmendable, Cowboy Cha Cha, El Paso, Carolionel Waltz and Swinging Summer to name a few.

About three times a year, they also have combined socials with Robert and Michelle's line dance class. So anyone else who wants to experience a true country social that has line and partner dancing as well as two stepping, is welcome to join them.

Pat said it's great to see the dance floor full. "There might be a split floor for line dancers doing a beginner and a more advanced dance, with a partner dance or two stepping being done in a circle on the outside. An example would be Champagne on Ice for the intermediate dancers with the Woolshed Waltz for beginners and the Carolionel Waltz as a partner dance.

"It's great to have that male/female balance in the class. The guys aren't as serious. They bring a different atmosphere and humour to the class. We do a lot of socialising during the night!"

Pat

"I prefer to dance with a lady than by myself," said Lee.

"I started line dancing about 14 years ago and still enjoy it.

"But the first time I saw partner dancing it really appealed to me. My wife, Trish, is a keen line dancer but wasn't particularly interested. I knew Janelle was, so I asked her if she would partner me. We have been dancing together for three years now.

"So I do both dance styles and really enjoy them both. I also prefer dancing to country music and used to do square dancing when I was younger. While line dancing has moved into other genres, partner dancing is still done mostly to country music.

"Men miss out on so much when they don't dance," said Lee. "It is just so enjoyable and you meet so many nice people, both men and women."



Lee and Janelle

Our Victorian Partners



Linda Pink

“Teaching partner dancing is very different to teaching line dancing. Probably because there is more interaction between couples, which in turn makes for a fun night. We certainly have a lot of laughs. Sometimes when we are learning a new dance we end up with arms and legs in all directions!”

Linda loves the social aspect of partner dancing. “People who don’t understand what it is all about don’t realise what they are missing. I just wish they would come along and see what a good time we have.

“I love my partner dancing but I also love my line dancing. Line dancing obviously is great for those that don’t have partners. But I think the two marry well together.

“We hold partner dancing workshops at the Mildura Country Music Festival in September each year. And we also teach at the Tamworth festival each year,” said Linda.

Robert, Pat and some of their students have attended workshops for partner dancing conducted by Linda Pink and Robert Neal of Jade Valley Bootscoters, Victoria.

“We were all amazed at the number of people on the floor two stepping and partner dancing, while the line dancers sat down and watched,” said Pat. “That is not something you see in Sydney except at our socials at Yagoona.”



Linda and dancing partner Robert Neal

Partner dancing is more popular in Victoria than most other states.

Linda Pink of L.V. Country Line Dancers says it has always been associated with line dancing in Victoria.

“Although it is only a small part of the overall scene, there are a number of clubs that have partner brackets during their socials.

“But there are quite a few partner dances we did 16 years ago that are still our favourites!

“When I first started line dancing, my instructor was a competition ballroom dancer. So we learnt some partner dances and from there we started teaching both in the Valley and in Melbourne.

“My classes are held weekly in the Valley. While these days I only teach partner dancing, I do love to two step.

“We have small clubs of about 10 couples. So to keep partner dancing alive, I also teach for half an hour prior to my socials. Then we have brackets during the night and it always fills the floor.

“I would love for it to be as popular here as it is in the States, so I will keep chipping away,” said Linda.

“It is a very safe and comfortable environment in which to learn and our style of partner dancing is more laid back than that of ballroom or old time dancing.

Pat: “I love two stepping and partner dancing. It’s just a lot of fun and a very relaxed atmosphere. I really look forward to our classes even though I have to battle the M5 in peak hour to get there!

“The highlight of two stepping for me was during a trip to the US with Strictly a few years ago. We were in a Honky Tonk Bar in Arizona down near the Mexican border. The atmosphere was fantastic with great music and lots of dancing. And a real cowboy with hat and spurs asked me to dance. Of course I did!

“I don’t know if I enjoy it more than line dancing because it is so different. I guess when I’m partner dancing and two stepping I love it - and when I’m line dancing I love that too.”

**Dancing is all about wordless communication –
a light pull on a shoulder, a step forward
and a shift of weight,
a shared understanding of the music
and how it moves bodies.***

*“It is just a nice atmosphere
and we have come to know
each other quite well over the
years.”*

Robert

Robert: “I enjoy learning the dances and teaching them to the students. Two stepping and partner dancing are harder than people imagine and new dancers have to really concentrate on the rhythm.

“As a teacher, it is more difficult because you have to teach them how to put all the movements together, steps, feet and arms, as well as doing each of them in a different direction for the gents to the ladies.

“This group is very friendly and some have been doing it for a quite a while. They come from as far as Canberra, the Blue Mountains and right across Sydney, so they travel quite a distance just to dance.”

Jan and Keith live in the Blue Mountains and started line dancing in 1993.

They first saw partner dancing at the Mildura Country Music Festival about eight years ago.

“We really liked it, so when we got home we tried to find somewhere locally to dance,” said Jan.

“We love country music. But we found that we were learning more and more line dances, to less and less country music. We used to go down to Victoria to The Morwell Ball every year for the partner dancing and had some wonderful times.

“We don’t line dance any more,” said Jan, “but we enjoy coming down to Yagoona every month.

“Partner dancing is something we can do together. And we like dancing with each other.”



Jan and Keith