

The Swing of Things

By Anthony Pearce

This is *not* your grandparent's two-step.

Swing dancing consistently invokes the same response. "God, that looks like so much fun!" And it is. Nostalgia beckons us. Eighties music and 70s clothes are both enjoying a second wind. But while these styles only define their decades, the era of swing dominated through two generations and two world wars. Now again, a nation swept up in patriotism is turning to swing and discovering that it is not just retro. It's thriving.

The Portland area features one of the strongest swing scenes on the West Coast. Particularly tight links

exist with similar venues from Seattle and Vancouver BC all the way down to San Diego and Los Angeles.



Conventions, exchanges, and Internet chat lists provide interaction between swing dancers around the world and the scene is still growing. DV8 on Sundays is the newest local addition and a Tuesday night Rose City venue opens in early 2002. Wednesdays the Temple Ballroom on 64th and Foster offers an all ages event,

while swing surfaces more sporadically at Berbatis, the Air Museum, the Crystal Ballroom and outdoor events like First Church of Swing. Check out www.swingout.net for dates and times.

The heart of Portland's partner dancing scene is the Viscount Ballroom on East Burnside. Tuesdays and Fridays feature swing dancing from 7:30-12:30 and both evenings start with a free basic swing lesson, providing newcomers with a sufficient repertoire to spend their very first night out on the dance floor. Tuesdays include a DJ and the option of a West Coast lesson while every

Friday the club hosts a live band. Downstairs the Viscount Studio offers a variety of weekly dance classes. A full schedule can be found at www.viscountballroom.com.

No partner required. Certainly, you can come as a couple and spend a romantic night dancing together, but this is a dance form that emerged when men were away at war or only in town for a day of leave. People regularly switch partners with each song, learning new moves and meeting new people.

"It's a friendly scene," explains Viscount dance instructor, Brian Todd. "You don't have to be the world's best dancer overnight. Everyone knows what it's like not to know

how." You can always come back to a partner you like. For those you can't stand, hey, the song is only three minutes long. "If there's a better way for a guy to meet 20-30 women in an hour I'd like to know about it," points out one local swing dancer. While another describes the adventurous, alternative crowd as "not as pick-up bar-ish as the salsa scene."

Cover charges range from \$6-\$10 for most venues. High profile bands sometimes cost up to \$15. Casual dress will keep you comfortable for hours of dancing. Of course, for those who like to dress up, swing offers four decades of styles to choose from. Swing attracts all ages; a creative, energetic crowd making a special

effort to spend their nights doing something different and fun. AP