



## EDITOR'S BYLINE

Cindy Hadley, MA, MHA

### Do You Really Need all those Shoes?

Tim and I teach for several round dance weekends a year and I carry a small airline carryon suit case for my shoes. He always wants to know if I really need all of those shoes. I have a habit of changing my shoes about every hour of a dance, it gives my feet a respite and me more energy. Of course each pair serves a purpose and many of my shoes are custom dance shoes made for me. Dance shoes are your equipment for the sport you are about to participate in. You would never see athletes even practicing in street shoes. Their specific shoe is designed for support in key areas and to help prevent injury and dance is no different.

Imagine Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers gliding across the stage in perfect synchronization, performing skillful moves and intricate footwork. Now imagine that they are wearing street shoes, sneakers, or no footwear at all. Even people who are not trained in dance are aware that dance shoes are crucial to achieving proper technique as well as protecting the body. When dancing, the feet must be well supported and yet able to flex, point, and twist quickly. Specially made ballroom shoes provide both support and freedom of movement. Buyers of ballroom shoes should first understand the differences between dance shoes and street shoes so that they can gain a true appreciation for the cost and specific features of dance footwear. Shoppers should also realize that shoes for traditional ballroom dances are different from Latin dance shoes.

Finally, as with any shoes, getting the right fit is a must for comfort, safety, and correct execution of steps.

With the variety of styles, specializations and colors available, choosing your first pair of ballroom dance shoes can be a difficult decision. As a beginning dancer, however, there is no reason why you would need more than one pair. Unless you have specific needs you should be looking for something that is comfortable, suits a variety of styles and looks great on your foot.

To the uninitiated, women's ballroom dance shoes may not appear to be any different from regular women's high heels, particularly in the case of shoe styles worn for performances, but there is in fact a big difference. Women's dance shoes are more carefully engineered, with better heel placement to improve balance and steadiness, thus it is much easier to dance in high-heeled ballroom shoes than in fashion heels.

If you are new to round dancing or ballroom dancing you might consider peek-a-boo toe for beginning ladies because it suits both the Ballroom and Latin dances really well. A peek-a-boo shoe is much more flexible than a Ballroom pump so you will still be able to arch your foot, point your toes and 'grip' the floor. At the same time a peek-a-boo shoe offers more support than a Latin sandal, and definitely keeps your toes more protected. You may also find a T-strap is helpful as it adds a little more support and stability for your foot.

It is not a good idea to get heels that are too high, especially when you first learn to dance. Everyone wants to look good and feel great when they're dancing, and choosing a heel height that you can't handle will make you look bad and feel worse. A 2 - 2.5 inch heel is pretty standard. If you have difficulties with balance, or aren't used to wearing heels you might consider a wider heel, or even a flat shoe to start with. Remember that it is very difficult to focus on learning dance steps if you are wobbling around like a newborn giraffe. I personally choose relatively low heel heights and wider bases due to an injury and if you already have hip, ankle or knee issues please consider this in your footwear choice.

Black is a nice color for a pair of starter shoes because it looks more like a regular shoe, goes with most clothing and can easily go from "dinner" to "dancing". Another color that is very popular with dancers is nude. Nude shoes do not stand out as much, which is nice because mistakes are not as noticeable and your legs will look longer. They also go well with both summer dresses and winter clothing. You can get both leather and satin shoes in nude and if your particular style or skin color isn't available, you can usually find the style you want in white satin and dye it nude. The vendor often offers this service or you can dye them yourself.

For men your first pair of ballroom dance shoes is a no-brainer. You want a comfortable leather ballroom shoe that fits well and has good support. If you want to stand out a little more you will probably be able to find something with some interesting styling (different weaves, cuts, textures). However, you should probably avoid patent shoes as they are most appropriate in very formal situations. Tim Eum loves his patent leather shoes however we save them for demos and the occasional teach when we are formally dressed. You should also steer clear of Latin shoes unless you only plan to learn Latin dances (Latin shoes have a higher 'Cuban heel' which makes taking heel leads very uncomfortable). Even if you never plan to learn to Waltz or Foxtrot it is easier to learn your first dance steps (and many more after that) in a normal leather ballroom shoe.

Most men choose black because they are readily available and go with anything, which will probably suit you just fine. More colors are available and you can definitely opt for custom shoes to match a particular shirt or suit if desired.

There are a lot of good reasons to buy ballroom dance shoes even though they can be pretty expensive (they are quite specialized and usually imported from Europe). Furthermore we feel it is worth the money to get a good quality shoe with the proper support rather than going with a cheaper pair. At the very least try on a few different pairs to get a sense for what feels good on your foot.

### **Features of Ballroom Shoes**

Men's ballroom dance shoes are more obviously distinct from street shoes in terms of looks.

Shoes for both genders often include a suede or "chrome leather" sole that allows the foot to slide smoothly without being dangerously slippery. Ballroom dance shoes in general are also made much better; after all, the shoes must be strong and remain securely attached to the feet at all times. A broken shoe or a shoe that comes off the foot during a performance is not only humiliating for the dancer but can cause serious injuries, so quality assurance for dance footwear is inherently more stringent than that of street shoes.

### **Ballroom Dance Shoe Brands**

Certain manufacturers who specialize in dance shoes usually do not make street shoes as well, so some of the well-known dance shoe brands may be unfamiliar to the beginner. Popular ballroom dance shoe companies include Dance Naturals, Mythique, and Capezio (for women). There are certainly other good brands; asking for recommendations from fellow dancers or teachers is a great way to go.

### **Ballroom Dance Styles**

Different types of shoes are called for when performing different dances. Almost all ballroom dance styles fall into one of two categories: regular ballroom and Latin dances. Examples of the most common dance names in each category are listed below.

### **Regular Ballroom Dances**

The most common standard dances in the ballroom are:

- Foxtrot
- Quickstep
- Tango
- Viennese waltz
- Waltz

Other dances and sequences that may be incorporated into less formal dance performances are the saunter as well as the lindy hop and other variations of swing.

### **Latin Dances**

The most popular Latin ballroom dances include

- Cha cha
- Jive
- Paso doble
- Rumba
- Samba

Other Latin dances whose moves and steps may be incorporated into more freestyle routines include bossa nova, salsa, and merengue.

Dancers should have an idea of which type of dancing they are most interested in before purchasing ballroom shoes, since the styles vary for each category.

### **Men's Ballroom Shoes**

As with most fashion items, men have fewer options than women, which makes things easier. Of course, celebrities and professionals may rely on and get away with a "lucky" pair of shoes, such as the signature black-and-white shoes worn by "Dancing with the Stars" pro Mark Ballas. With the exception of performance shoes, almost all men's ballroom shoes are black.

### **Men's Standard Vs. Latin Ballroom Shoes**

Standard dance shoes for men are lace-up oxfords with a flat heel. Men's Latin dance shoes are similar to standard shoes, except that they have a heel of 1 or 2 inches.

### **Women's Ballroom Shoes**

Ballroom dance shoes for women come in a variety of styles and colors, especially for performances, but student and everyday/practice shoes are typically neutrals such as black, white, or beige.

### **Women's Standard Ballroom Shoes**

The standard ballroom dance shoe for women usually has a closed toe and a medium to moderately high heel.

### **Women's Latin Ballroom Shoes**

Unlike ballroom shoes, Latin dance shoes almost always have an open toe. The heel is higher, up to 3 inches, and more slender. In general, ladies' Latin dance shoes have a sexier look than the more classic ballroom shoes.

### **Women's Practice Shoes**

Women have the option of rehearsing in special practice shoes. These shoes are less aesthetically pleasing but more secure. They are generally a high-heeled lace-up oxford and have a sturdier heel.

### **Getting the Right Fit**

Fit is of the utmost importance with any athletic shoes and particularly with dance shoes. An ill-fitting pair of shoes can result in minor foot problems, such as blisters and corns, or more serious issues, such as stress fractures and pain. Fitting dance shoes is a bit different than fitting street shoes, however. In general, ballroom shoes should fit quite snugly and not allow the foot to move at all inside the shoe.

The toes should come just to the end of the shoe or, in the case of open-toed shoes, actually hang slightly over the edge of the shoe. This is counterintuitive to what people are taught regarding street shoes; however, as long as the shoes are not painfully tight, a snug fit is ideal. In the case of leather shoes, it is even suggested to purchase the shoes a half or whole size smaller than one's normal street shoe size to allow for stretching over time. This depends on the sizing system used by the manufacturer, though; some companies change their sizing to account for this factor already.

### **Shoe Size Variations**

While some dance shoes are sized just like regular street shoes, others run differently, so be sure to check description details for sizing advice, or ask a sales professional how the shoes are sized. Most buyers can go by their current shoe size or check a conversion chart for the brand of shoes they are purchasing. Shoppers who would like to confirm their shoe size or order custom shoes can measure their feet at home.

### **Taking Foot Measurements for Ballroom Shoes**

The following tools are needed to measure one's feet at home:

- Paper
- Pen or pencil
- Ruler
- Tape

Tape a piece of paper to a hard floor and sit down. Place one stocking foot on the paper. Holding the pen or pencil completely vertical, trace around the outline of the foot. Repeat the process with the other foot. Use the ruler to measure the length and width of each foot in inches. For length, run the ruler from the back of the heel to the end of the big or second toe, whichever is longer. For width, hold the ruler across the widest part of the ball of the foot. Subtract 1/5 to 1/4 inch from each measurement to account for the diameter of the pencil. Finally, convert the measurements to centimeters in case non-U.S. shoes are purchased. Next, consult the following charts for a general indication of correct size; however, keep in mind that shoe sizing standards do vary depending on the company and the country of origin. Always consult a salesperson, check the manufacturer's website, or ask an individual seller whether the shoes run true to size or larger or smaller than normal.

## **Women's Dance Shoe Size Chart**

This woman's chart converts inches to an American shoe size.

Length of Foot in Inches	Shoe Size (U.S.)
8 1/6	4
8 1/3	4 1/2
8 1/2	5
8 2/3	5 1/2
8 5/6	6
9	6 1/2
9 1/6	7
9 1/3	7 1/2
9 1/2	8
9 2/3	8 1/2
9 5/6	9
10	9 1/2
10 1/6	10
10 1/3	10 1/2
10 1/2	11
10 2/3	11 1/2
10 5/6	12

Women with shoes smaller than a size 4 may be able to wear a girl's ballroom shoe. Women whose feet are larger than a 12 may be restricted to buying shoes from certain companies or may need to have shoes custom-made.

## **Men's Dance Shoe Size Chart**

The following chart converts inches to a men's American shoe size.

Length of Foot in Inches	Shoe Size (U.S.)
9 1/3	6
9 1/2	6 1/2
9 2/3	7
9 5/6	7 1/2
10	8
10 1/6	8 1/2
10 1/3	9
10 1/2	9 1/2
10 2/3	10
10 5/6	10 1/2
11	11
11 1/6	11 1/2
11 1/3	12
11 1/2	12 1/2
11 2/3	13
11 5/6	13 1/2
12	14

Men with shoes smaller than a size 6 may be able to wear a boy's ballroom shoe. Men whose feet are larger than a 14 may be restricted to buying shoes from certain companies or may need to have shoes custom-made.

## **Where to Find Ballroom Shoes**

Ballroom shoes of the simplest styles may be available in larger department stores, but a wider selection is available through specialty dance suppliers, either in brick-and-mortar stores, via mail order catalog, or online. Dance shoes may also be custom-made.

You may be able to find used children's ballroom shoes at yard sales or in consignment shops. Many times, individuals take up dance only to decide it is not for them, so sometimes the shoes are barely worn; other times, dancers simply used their shoes for an occasion and no longer need them. Adults can sometimes find good pre-owned dance shoes as well.

Some people may try to sell worn-out shoes, so always be sure to thoroughly inspect the condition of the shoes before making a purchase.

Loette Hindmon of Avant Dance shoes has frequented DRDC dances for many years. She features Glide, Coast, Elegance, and Kelaci brands. Custom orders are available as well as pro soles providing additional padding. Ms. Hindmon can be reached at 423-400-4464 or by email at loetteh@gmail.com.

### **How to Buy Ballroom Shoes Online**

Amazon, Ebay, and many ballroom vendors offer a huge assortment of ballroom dance shoes for everybody and for every style of dance. To find them quickly, you can enter "ballroom shoes" into the Search box on the homepage. You can then further narrow down the returned listings by selecting a category filter for women's, or men's. You might also add this detail to your initial keyword search by typing in "women's ballroom shoes." Other details can be added to the keyword search, such as colors, sizes, materials, and so on. Ballroom dance shoes are usually listed both in the regular fashion category for shoes and in a specialty dancewear category, so be sure to check out listings in both locations in order to see the widest variety of offerings.

### **Conclusion**

The right ballroom shoes make all the difference in one's comfort, stamina, and ability to execute tricky dance moves. Dance shoes must withstand a tremendous amount of wear and tear without breaking or failing in any way. Dancers should decide whether they are primarily interested in standard ballroom dances or Latin dances and then choose their shoes accordingly. Latin shoes for both sexes have a higher heel than the regular ballroom shoes. Women's Latin shoes most often feature an open toe, unlike regular ballroom footwear. For dance lessons, black and neutrals are popular; performance shoes allow for more freedom in the look of the shoe. Getting the right fit with ballroom shoes is not the same as fitting street shoes. In general, dance shoes should be shorter and fit more snugly without causing any discomfort. Always get expert advice on how a particular manufacturer's shoes run. Armed with this information, any dance student can become a happier dancer.

### **MINUTES OF DIXIE ROUND DANCE COUNCIL**

**Saturday, January 31, 2015**

**BSDA Friendship Hall – Birmingham, AL**

Chairman Tim Eum called the meeting to order at 9:15 AM, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Officer Reports**

**Secretary:** Martha Weber said that we have not used a motion in past years – if there were no corrections or changes in the minutes, the President stated they were approved as printed. Martha advised that the minutes of the September 6, 2014 meeting were printed in the September/October/November newsletter, and asked for any corrections and changes. As members had none, she noted that the minutes would be accepted as printed. Tim asked whether all were in agreement, and members were.

**Treasurer:** Tim noted that Bob has been doing a super job as Treasurer. Bob Bradley gave a financial report for the current period, 9/1/14-12/31/14. We had approximately \$2,600 in revenue and \$900 in expenses. Our cash balance is \$25,177.68, up about \$700 from 1 year ago. It has increased because we were not able to send out the printed newsletter every month this past fall. He thinks Cindy Hadley is fixing that, getting it on a regular schedule. Failing to send out the newsletters, regrettable as that was, does help our balance because they are expensive to send out. He has copies of the report if anyone wants one. [*The 12/31/14 Financial Statement was printed in the January newsletter.*]

**Editor:** Cindy Hadley, our temporary newsletter editor, advised that she has all the data in and a December/January issue will be out February 1. When on schedule, the newsletter deadline has been around the 18<sup>th</sup> of the preceding month, sending to the printer by the 20<sup>th</sup>, and the printed version mailed the 1<sup>st</sup> week of the month (with the online version available immediately). When she inherited the newsletter, this schedule was impossible to meet. They agreed to do a December/January issue as soon as possible, a February issue immediately afterward (issuing about 2/15), and the March issue closer to the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month, eventually returning to the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month schedule. The members applauded Cindy for handling this big job.