

Why We Teach Social Dance

By: Bob Schaffer, LCHS Principal

Liberty’s social-dance course reinforces our philosophy toward a high-quality, classical, liberal-arts education. We first offered the class in 2013, and it has become a permanent part of the school’s curriculum.

Students who opt for the course love it; and the elective has been steadily gaining in popularity. **Ms. Debra Endres** is our expert instructor.

Some say a high-school social-dance course is a forward-thinking endeavor. While that may be so, the germane value is that it connects us to our past and broadens our cultural literacy.



Throughout human history, social dance defines civilizations, distinguishes ethnicities, clarifies anthropology, and even influences politics. When expertly taught, social dance reacquaints us with a more polite age.

“A boy should not sit out a dance if any girl is not dancing.” One might recognize this advice from the 1934 book *Good Manners* from which we quote various rules in the “Classical Manners” column of every LCHS Monday Notes newsletter.

Recent entries have featured guidelines about how young people should behave at dances. For example, “In asking for a dance, a boy says, ‘May I have this dance?’ The girl replies, ‘Yes, you may’; or, ‘I’m sorry, but this dance is taken.’ Boys should avoid asking, ‘Have you this dance?’ or ‘Do you want to dance?’”

Authored by the late **Beth Bailey McLean**, *Good Manners* was used in American high schools throughout the 1930s, ‘40s, and ‘50s. In fact, a review in the 1935 edition of *The Palm Beach Post* suggested, “Every home with children should have (*Good Manners*) on their shelves for constant reference.” The old advice stands.

“If a boy is introduced to a girl at a dance, he must at once ask her for a dance. To omit this courtesy is very rude.” In those days, most young people knew how to dance – respectfully with dignity and honor – and thus enjoyed ever-ready, wholesome fun.



To the bigger point: Knowing the history, the importance, and most of all, the manners and etiquette of social dance arms our young men and women with extraordinary advantages extending well beyond the possession of enjoyable dance

skills. Social dance promotes healthy relationships among young people and gives them precise direction and confidence in how to interact properly with peers of the opposite sex.

In a classical context, perhaps a perfect summary of the cultural value of social dance is found at the *Blankeny Manor* website which is dedicated to *The Scarlet Pimpernel* novels of **Baroness Emma Orczy**. In an essay entitled “The Social Etiquette and Politics of Dance” one finds, “Dance was considered to embody ideal Greek attributes such as wit, serenity, breadth of vision, love of harmony and order, personal courage, irony, fun, and a distaste of passionate excesses.”

From a contemporary perspective, some research even asserts social dance prepares one for success in business. Dance-floor themes like teamwork, cooperation, consideration, mental dexterity, adaptability, respect, deference, and practice are of equivalent significance in a board room, or in an engineering group.

Ms. Endres has made a career out of connecting these concepts to professional dance instruction, and she is thrilled to be teaching the cultural elements of social dance to Liberty students. “It’s a fabulous exercise for the brain, body and soul,” she says. “Social dance is wonderful for their communication skills. It brings out joy in their hearts and will last them a lifetime.”



Liberty was first persuaded to add social dance after noting the longstanding success of Ridgeview’s social-dance course. In keeping with the wisdom of classical themes, we tend to admire and to be inclined toward that which is proven, that which has worked and that which has led others toward truth, beauty, goodness and perfection.

Accordingly, Liberty’s semester-long social-dance curriculum has proven to be a superb addition to our elective offerings. The course indeed leads our students further along the path toward mature literacy, mature virtue, and social elegance – with lots of joyful smiles along the way.