

AggieLife

THE BATTALION

3A
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Swing, brother, swing

Aggie swing dancers take their talent to campus and beyond

By Lyndsey Sage
THE BATTALION

While the rage for swing dance has faded since the 1930s and 40s, students such as Kendra Morris, Class of 1998 and a current computer science graduate student, and other members of the Aggie Swing Cats, keep the fad in full swing in the A&M community.

"Once you get into it, it's an addiction," Morris said. "It's like the quote they have for A&M, 'From the outside looking in, you don't understand it; from the inside looking out, you can't explain it.'"

Morris, president of the Aggie Swing Cats, a swing dance organization founded in

the Spring 1999, became interested in swing when she attended a wedding reception with had a sock hop theme. She took the initiative to attend lessons hosted by the Aggie Swing Cats. Since then, swing dancing has become a major part of her life.

"When I first got started, I danced four to five times a week. Now I only dance two or three times a week," she said.

Morris said it was easy to pick up the basics of swing, and once she had those steps perfected, she learned more advanced moves and how to react to a dancing partner.

Morris has been a member of the Aggie Swing Cats for two years. Morris said the Swing Cats are active in anything that has to do with swing, whether it is a concert, a road trip to a workshop or dance, teaching lessons or hosting dances and exchanges. Swing Cats often travel to surrounding cities such as Houston and Austin to hit dance floors or attend swing workshops.

"Last weekend we went to the Great Southwest Lindy Festival in Houston. Instructors from all over the nation were there, including Frankie Manning and Dawn Hampton," Morris said. "We listened to them reminisce about what it was like dancing in the 30s and 40s."

Listening to the stories of Manning and Hampton, who played major roles in the invention and development of swing, was just one of the highlights Morris has experienced since becoming involved with swing. Piling into a car with fellow members to attend various out-of-town dances, competitions and workshops are another aspect of the swing scene that Morris has enjoyed.

"This is a very unique area," Morris said. "People from Houston and Austin show up at our events, and we show up at theirs."

Recently, Morris and several Swing Cats spent their Sunday from 3 p.m. to midnight in Houston learning new dance moves

and displaying them on the dance floor.

Julia McGarey, a senior English major, has been active in the Swing Cats since the club was founded, said the music was the original force that drew her into swing. McGarey said swing dancing has since provided her several opportunities.

"I like it because it is a social dance; you dance with everybody," McGarey said. "You meet so many people."

The dance floor is not the only place to meet people. McGarey said one easily forms relationships through a nationwide network of dancers.

"Once you get into [swing], you can find a place to stay as long as there is a dance scene there," McGarey said. "You invite people to come and stay and dance all weekend; it's called an exchange. I've been to San Francisco, Chicago and I'm about to go to [Washington] D.C."

Dusty Reagan, a member of the Swing Cats and junior computer science major, said he was introduced into the swing scene and found the dance offered a common bond to many other swing dancers throughout the nation.

"Once you get into it, they have exchanges and workshops, and, a lot of the time, they are nationwide," Reagan explained. "The longer that you're in the scene, the more people you meet from out of state. It's cool to see you know people from other cities and states when you go to these workshops and exchanges."

The Swing Cats frequent these workshops, where different levels and dance elements are taught. As he acquires more skill through these classes, Reagan has become active in performing. Recently, he was accepted into a performance team in Houston.

"A lot of people see swing dance ads on commercials where they are doing the aerials and big stuff," Reagan said. "But on the social dance floor it is not so much so. It's real laid back, you can do almost anything. Aerials are more for exhibition and jam sessions."

McGarey's involvement with swing has led to more than travel. McGarey, along with about 25 other swing dancers from across Texas, performed in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney.

"We practiced every other weekend, all weekend, from February to September. Most people had been practicing for two years; since we only had such a short period of time, we had to work extra hard," McGarey said.

While many hold the perception of swing as "just another dance," Reagan said swing dancing is a skill and art form.

"You can always keep building on it," Reagan said. "You could keep going forever and ever."



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GAY AWARENESS WEEK

- April 1:** ♦ True Diversity: Exploring Race, Gender, Sexuality Programming by Magadalen Hsu-Li from 2-4 pm in Rudder Tower 401
♦ Magadalen Hsu-Li Concert at Rudder Theatre at 8 pm
You can get your tickets \$5 at the MSC Box Office: 845-1234
♦ Domestic Partner Benefits in Rudder 501 @ 5:30
- April 2:** ♦ Film: Hedwig and the Angry Inch in Koldus 111 at 7:30 pm
♦ Lunchbox Concert: Shade 12-1 pm at Rudder Fountain
- April 3:** ♦ GLBTA Social: For more info email Justin: spenserve@yahoo.com
♦ Same Sex Marriage at Rudder Fountain: tamunow@yahoo.com
- April 4:** ♦ National Day of Silence: Support materials at Rudder Fountain
♦ The Way Discrimination Based on Gender Intersects With Other Kinds of Discrimination by Riki Wilchins at 7 pm in MSC 206
- April 5:** ♦ Evening of the Arts: Going Beyond Oppression in MSC 201 at 7 pm
- April 6:** ♦ Cabaret at 7pm at Manor East Mall: 779-1302
- April 7:** ♦ GLBT PN Picnic at Hensel Park from 2-6 pm

Sponsored by the Office of Gender Issues Education Services (845-1107), GLBTA, MSC Film Society, MSC Town Hall, GLBT PN, and ALLIES. <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/gies/>

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In the Team Traditions cube
(2nd floor MSC, above the sweet shop)

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