

'Forward! . . . hip drop! . . . shoulder shimmy! . . . undulate!'

University Plus belly dancing classes provide students with strenuous exercise, exotic recreation

By Katsy Pittman

Of The Battalion Staff

Angela Consford was flipping through one of the thousands of University Plus magazines found around campus at the beginning of the semester when one of the dance courses caught her eye.

Having already taken ball room dancing from University Plus, Consford, a senior secondary education major from San Augustine thought a belly dancing class might be fun.

The class turned out to be so much fun, Consford is now thinking of joining a local belly-dancing troupe.

Instructor Nancie Cortiaus said belly dancing is the latest craze to hit the nation. She moved with her family to College Station about seven years ago and has been teaching belly dancing classes at A&M since.

If you're thinking that the conservative A&M campus is the last place students would sign up for exotic dance classes, it might surprise you to know the classes are often filled before many students get a chance to sign up.

Times have definitely changed. "I taught belly dancing class at a time when you would be stoned for using the word 'feminine,'" Cortiaus said. "And belly dancing is a very, very feminine dance form."

Egyptian, Persian, Algerian, Indian, and even some American forms of belly dances are taught in Cortiaus' class.

"I use every possible kind of Middle Eastern style that I can correct (the students on)," Cortiaus said.

Cortiaus' students aren't the only ones interested in her class. The dancers get a lot of looks from male students in adjoining MSC rooms. In fact, one time when the belly dancing class ran a little over, an all-male assertiveness training class outside almost broke the door down.

But if you think that all belly dancers do is wear a lot of veils and show a little navel, you might be surprised to learn that belly dancing is a great form of exercise.

"The aerobics craze has come and

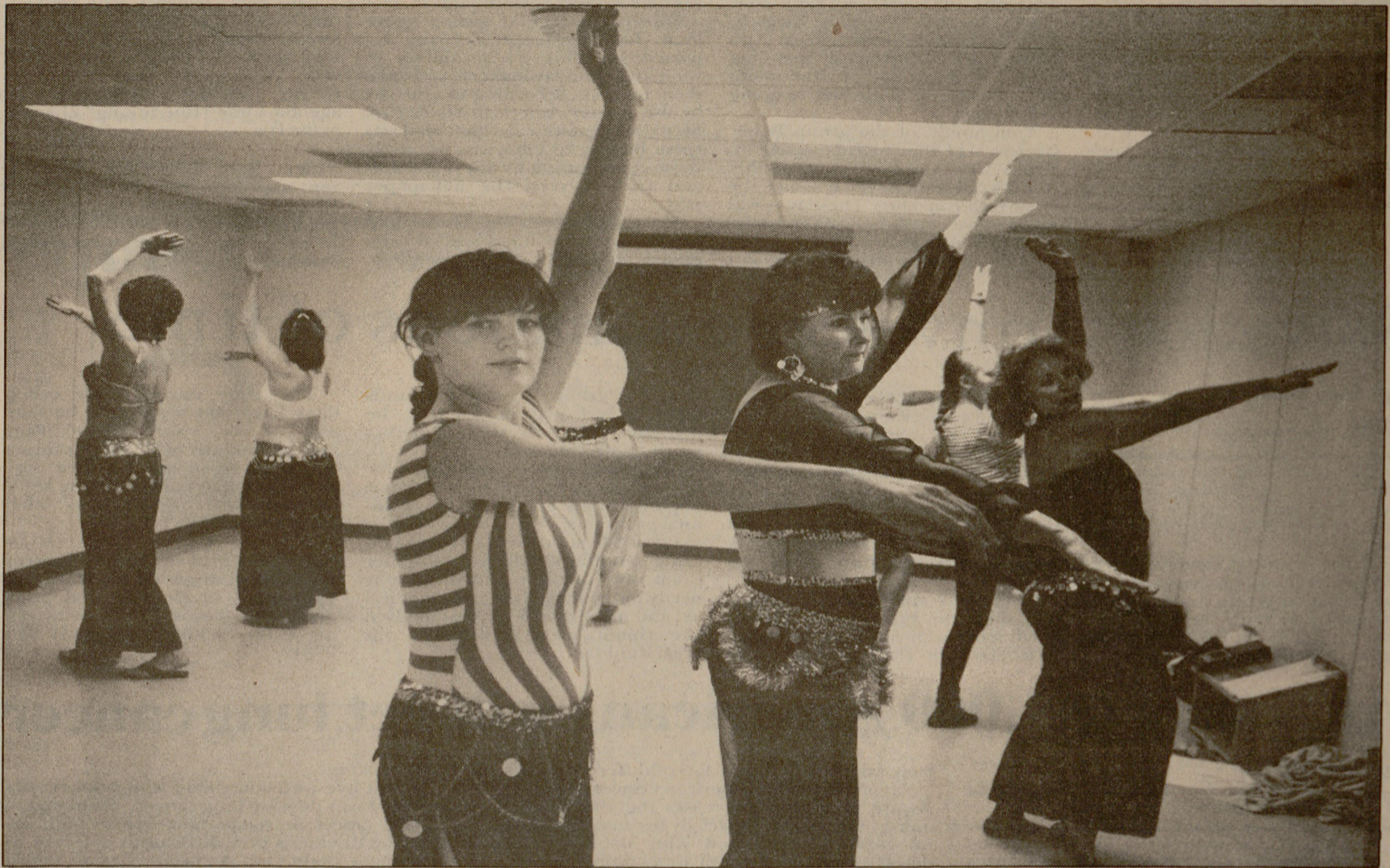


Photo by Kathy Haveman

Kathy Wehrmeister (left), Marian Wilkerson and instructor Nancie Cortiaus (right) practice belly dancing Tuesday eve-

ning in the MSC. The dance class is a popular offering of A&M's University Plus program.

gone. I taught aerobics for years and totally flattened out my feet by doing it," Cortiaus said. "But belly dancing is non-stressful and you can't find a better way to strengthen your abdominal muscles."

The 20-odd women in Cortiaus' class agree that their muscles feel the burn. They just can't agree where they feel it the most. Some say it's the arms, some the stomach and others the hips.

But they all smile as Cortiaus shouts out the movements.

"Forward! . . . hip drop! . . . shoulder shimmy! . . . down, up, down! . . . reverse! . . . undulate! Keep that pelvis under control — that's another

kind of dance," Cortiaus jokes.

It keeps Karen Balke, a graduate statistics student from Pasadena, laughing through the dance.

"I love the class!" Balke said. "The warm-up exercises hurt, but Nancie

doesn't mind if we moan and about it among ourselves. She's teacher and it's a fun class."

Balke said all her friends practice — especially her male friends.

"They always tell me to come and show them what I've learned. Balke said while laughing, "For some reason, they are very afraid to critique me."

However, Balke doesn't put any performances for them. For matter Balke is still a little embarrassed to perform for anyone. Cortiaus said that most of her students are like that.

"They never want to dance for anyone, and the last person to dance for is their boyfriend," Cortiaus said. "They're afraid they might not be perfect enough."

So exactly what types of classes continue dancing after the class? Cortiaus said she's been teaching classes for so many years it's predictable.

"By and large, the ones who sign up with it are the very, very feminine type. The jocks are attracted because of a whim, and because of good exercise, but they never stick with it."

Cortiaus said most of the original Eastern dancers didn't dance with it very long either. That's because many hundreds of years ago the dancers were very poor, unmarried girls who were looking for money for their dowries, they would go dance in the marketplaces, which, and attach belly dancers to their (coins is why they dance in the wear symbolic coin belts).

After the girls earned money for their dowries, they put their bare pants away and put on their modest robes.

But the modern Aggies in Cortiaus' class aren't worried about earning enough money to support their husbands.

"The best thing of all is that you can do something that not only other people know how to do, but Balke. "It keeps you young."

'Steel Magnolias' blooming with wit, convincing acting, heartwarming hilarity

By Todd Stone and Chuck Lovejoy

Of The Battalion Staff

"Steel Magnolias" is a film blooming with offbeat characters, serious situations and all the wit, candor and innuendo one would expect from a movie about six Southern women grinding the gossip mill of a small town.

The film was presented by MSC Aggie Cinema as a free sneak preview Monday night in Rudder Auditorium. The audience was so captivated by the movie that not even the bats dive-bombing the screen could break their concentration on the film's heartwarming tale.

Robert Harling wrote the screenplay, basing it on his acclaimed play of the same title. The film is intended to be an expansion — not just a recapitulation — of the play, which is patterned after the lives of his mother and sister.

The original story takes place entirely in a beauty salon in the fictional town of Chinquapin. The play was expanded for the big screen, adding most notably male characters, which were only gossiped about in the play.

Rich visual settings, such as a wedding, funeral and a Christmas light festival — only described in the play — are also shown. Besides becoming a more well-rounded story, the film becomes an impressive visual effort.

This film is star-stuffed with six of today's most highly acclaimed actresses.

"Magnolias" begins on the wedding day of Shelby Eatenton, expertly played by Julia Roberts. She and her mother, M'Lynn (two-time Oscar winner Sally Field), as well as their friends and family, happily struggle through the trials and tribulations of the wedding preparations. They try to stop Mr. Eatenton (Tom Skerritt) from scaring away birds with his pistol and to prevent Shelby's younger brothers from decorating the wedding getaway car with condoms.

One of the funniest scenes of the movie is the wedding, the colors of which Shelby describes as "blush and bashful," but which M'Lynn describes as looking "like someone hosed down the church walls with Pepsibismol."

M'Lynn is a stern but still sweet mother. Her motto for raising her children is: "whatever makes you happy." Her husband, Shelby, is a



Ouiser Boudreaux (Shirley MacLaine) has a pleasant conversation with neighbor Drum

Eatenton (Tom Skerritt) in the film "Steel Magnolias," based on Robert Harling's play.

beautiful but diabetes-stricken woman who wants to be happy at any cost. This desire explains Shelby's decision to become pregnant, despite doctor's warnings that childbirth would be too great a strain on her body.

In the most touching moment of the movie, Shelby tells the skeptical M'Lynn that the consequences of the pregnancy don't matter to her.

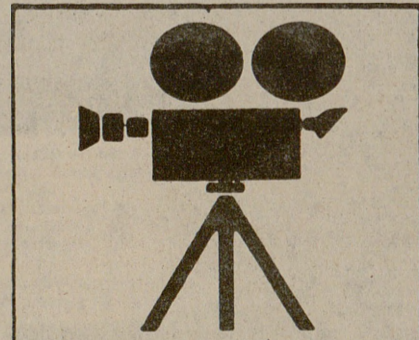
"I'd rather have 30 minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special," Shelby says.

Although the film does have several serious moments, "Magnolias" is one hoot of a film.

The plot centers around Shelby and M'Lynn, but the real story is the gossipy yet caring friendship shared by six friends: Shelby, M'Lynn, Truvy Jones (Dolly Parton), Ouiser Boudreaux (Shirley MacLaine), Anelle Desoto (Daryl Hannah) and Clairee Belcher (Olympia Dukakis).

MacLaine steals the screen as the town grinchette Ouiser, who is best typified by two of her friendlier lines: "You are a pig from hell" and "You are evil and should be destroyed." At one point she asks an un-

happy M'Lynn, "What's wrong, do you have a reindeer up your butt?" Dukakis is captivating as Clairee, the wealthy town busybody and closest



friend of Ouiser. Clairee is the antithesis of Ouiser because she is always happy, sweet and supportive.

Parton most notably features a permanent plastic smile in her hapless role as the sickeningly cheerful Truvy. Still, her performance in "Magnolias" is better than her previous film efforts. Daryl Hannah

barely attains mediocrity with her performance as the backward, born-again Christian Anelle.

Tom Skerritt, as M'Lynn's husband, Drum, is the only male actor that distinguishes himself from the female-dominated cast. Sam Shepard earns his character's name, Spud (Truvy's husband), and is forgettable and worthless in the role. It would appear that the film's producers were more interested in billing Shepard's name than in developing the character of Spud.

Veteran film director, Herbert Ross, who has directed 21 feature films including "The Secret Of My Success" and "The Goodbye Girl," balances the performances of all six actresses without allowing one to dominate over the rest.

Ross also smartly takes advantage of the scenery and small-town atmosphere of the town Natchitoches, La., where the film was made.

If you are a fan of any of the six actresses starting, or just want to see some vicious tongue-wagging, you won't be disappointed. To quote the character Shelby, "Steel Magnolias" is two hours of "wonderful."

Town Hall Coffeehouse director hopes to continue success, diversify show

By Chuck Lovejoy

Of The Battalion Staff

The third and final MSC Town Hall Coffeehouse of the 1989-90 school year will be held at 8 tomorrow night in the MSC tours snack bar.

Coffeehouse is a free amateur talent revue where the audience sits on the floor, enjoys free refreshments and snaps (instead of claps) to show appreciation for the performers.

Mark Kirk, Coffeehouse vice-chairman, said he expects a solid turnout for this week's performance by acoustic guitarist John Reysa, original poet Jarrett Downs and acoustic/vocal group None of Your Business, which performed at Coffeehouses in the spring.

Kirk also said this semester's first two shows were successes.

"The first two shows were as packed as the last couple of shows in the spring, when word about the show had finally gotten around," he said. "It's really been kind of surprising, but we couldn't have hoped for better."

Although this is the last Coffeehouse of this semester, Kirk said he is shooting for five shows in the spring.

He cited scheduling conflicts with other Town Hall programs, Bonfire activities and general "start-up" problems as reasons for only three shows this fall.

Coffeehouse is a revival of a beatnik talent show called the Basement Committee popular at Texas A&M in the '60s and '70s.

The first Coffeehouse was held in the fall of 1988. Performances continued through the spring. Coffeehouse was declared best new program in the MSC for the 1988-89 school year.

Kirk said he hopes to continue the Coffeehouse success by improving the show's pool of performers, in hopes of providing a more diverse show.

"We need a better cross-section of the performing arts," he said. "I feel our duty is to provide a venue for those acts who don't really fit anywhere else, like poets and multimedia performers."

"I'd love to get calls (asking to perform) from more poets and

dramatic readers or from people who play different kinds of instruments, such as a violinist."

Kirk also said he has considered moving Coffeehouse to a larger space so more people could be admitted. But he said there is no place at present that would allow him to retain the show's relaxed atmosphere.

"We considered moving it to the Rudder Forum, but you can't sit in there, and that's one of the audience's favorite things," Kirk said. "Also, you would have to sit in the chairs there — and people like sitting on the floor."

"Rumors isn't an ideal plan especially in the warmer months, but we'll just have to live with it."

But regardless of the show's or audience's — size, Kirk said

"Coffeehouse is still in its infancy, but it seems to be growing exponentially."

— Mark Kirk, Coffeehouse vice-chairman

mainly is concerned with providing the best show he can.

"Coffeehouse is still in its infancy, but it seems to be growing exponentially," he said. "As Coffeehouse gets more and more loyal patrons and a larger performer pool — it will get better and better."

Kirk said he thinks Coffeehouse, along with other programs such as OPAS and the growing A&M music department, is playing a part in A&M's transition to more well-rounded institutions.

"Because of this, A&M is moving from a traditional school that concentrated on agriculture and mechanics to a more diverse institution — not that (what it was before) was bad," Kirk said.

"I'm glad it's happening," he said. "And that's coming from an engineering major."