

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Lords of the dance

Aggie Wranglers take country-western dancing to a new level

By Emily Vincent
THE BATTALION

Two-stepping and jitterbugging have become weekly traditions for some Texas A&M students. Students congregate at places such as Hurricane Harry's and the Texas Hall of Fame to show off dance moves.

Since 1984, members of the Aggie Wranglers have been able to participate in this dancing tradition to an even greater degree. The Wranglers is a group of students who take their dancing skills and choreographed routines and showcase them to other students, Texans, and citizens of other countries.

The opportunity to travel comes with Aggie Wrangler membership. The Wranglers have performed all over the world.

Sarah Douglass, public relations chair and a senior mechanical engineering technologies major, said the Wranglers' fame makes scheduling performances easy.

"In most cases, people just come to us wanting performance," Douglass said. We give a lot of repeat performances and word of mouth is probably our most popular method of advertising. There are Aggies everywhere."

This popularity has assisted the Wranglers in its national and international travels. The member's performances are demanded at places from A&M oriented functions such as MSC Open House and First Yell to the Festival of Lights in Gravelotte, Germany and TNNs "Club Dance." Former President George Bush and the U.S. Marines have extended personal invitations to the members to perform in Iwakuni, Japan.

"We've gotten to dance in many different kinds of situations," Douglass said. "Recently we were able to travel to and perform on a tiny island in Belize. There were no paved roads and we danced on a basketball court. One of my favorite trips in Texas was to the Gene Autry Festival in Tioga, Texas. The decorations and costumes were old-fashioned and authentic. It was adorable."

In addition to performing for new audiences, traveling allows members of the Aggie Wranglers to get to know each other on a different level. Douglass found her current partner on the Wranglers' database, which helps people find dance partners. She said she now considers him one of her best friends because of the time they have been able to spend

together practicing and traveling.

Colette Oliver, a senior marketing major said the group shares a close bond.

"(Wranglers) is just like having another family. We spend a lot of time together and you can always depend on the rest of the team for support even if you happen to make mistakes," Oliver said. "It's a great experience to learn to trust people like this. Everyone tries harder because if something happens the whole team is involved instead of a single person."

The variety of the members contributes to the dynamics of the group.

"Everyone on Aggie Wranglers has really different personalities and backgrounds but it allows us to balance each other out," Oliver said. "We have a little bit of everything and we all mesh to make it work."

Oliver, who has a strong ballet background, is a relatively new convert to country and western dancing.

"I didn't even like country music," Oliver said, "But, one night my friends dragged me to Harry's and I danced with someone. My part-

ner and I kept practicing together and made the team."

Personality combinations are an important part of the tryout process the team uses to accept new members.

Jon Kassaw, president of Aggie Wranglers and a senior wildlife and fisheries science major, has been active in judging several Wrangler tryouts.

"During tryouts we don't just look at technical skills,"

Kassaw said. "The communication between the couple is also very important. If they are communicating, frustrated or enjoying themselves at tryouts, it shows. We can tell how they are going to dance in the future."

In addition to traveling and performing, the Wranglers hold classes for students and community members six times a year: twice in the spring, summer and fall. Classes are organized for people with any kind of dancing background.

Audrey Shaw, a junior animal science major, took classes with the Wranglers after seeing the team perform at MSC Open House.

"They looked like they were having a lot of fun while they were performing," Shaw said. "It was a great way to meet new people and learn new things. The fact that the lessons were structured and very well explained made it a lot easier to dance instead of just going out on a Thursday night and making things up as you go along."

Students aren't the only people who participate in the classes.

"It's great when we have people from the community taking part in the lessons," Oliver said. "Most students at A&M know us but when other people come to our classes we have the chance to tell them who we are and what we are about."

For information on performance and dance lesson dates, visit www.tamu.edu/aggie_wranglers.

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Former Aggie Wranglers, Justin Hoes (Class of '01) and Melissa Gonzales (Class of '02) perform "Aerial Birth."

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