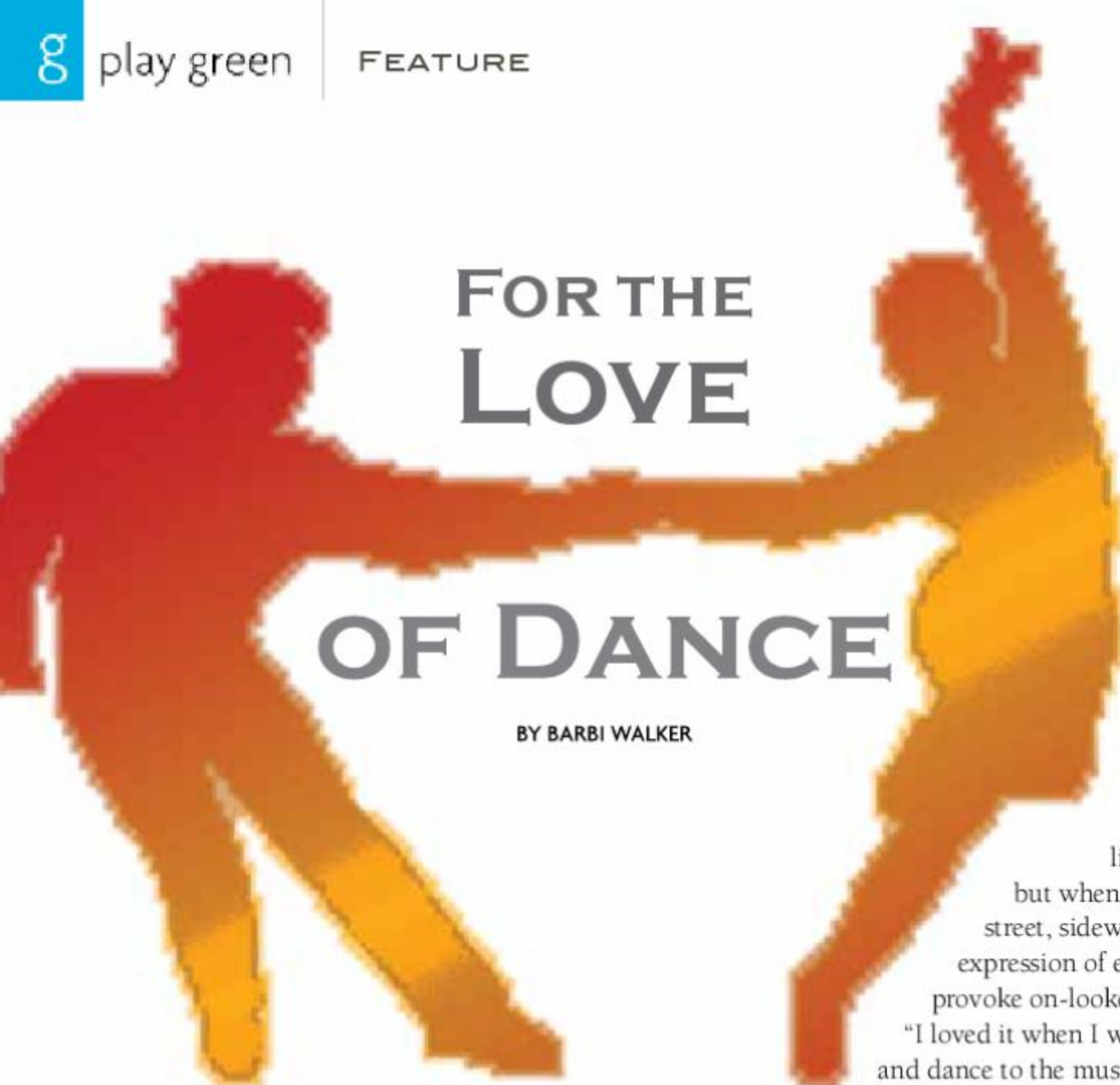




FOR THE LOVE OF DANCE

BY BARBI WALKER

Dance is the movement of the human body through space and time to a rhythm or pattern. It can be to music or a metronome, choreographed or free-style, but dance always involves the body in motion.

Watching the graceful fluidity of ballet or the heart-pounding moves of the samba can communicate feelings of awe, or even inspiration to the observer. Dance has been communicating for thousands of years. Tribes from North America to Africa have carried down tales of heartbreak, love, longing and important lessons illustrated by dance.

People's love of dance hasn't faded today, just look at the Nielsen ratings where *Dancing With the Stars*, a reality/dancing show, is now in its twelfth season and regularly holds the number one spot with over 22 million viewers.

When I asked professional dancers, "Why does dancing matter?" I wasn't being rhetorical; I really wanted to know, what made people care so much about dance?

Aileen Mapes, a dance teacher in Austin, TX, with a Master of Fine Arts from Arizona State University, said, "It's an ephemeral experience, it's a personal experience. I think dance is emotional and spiritual, and to come see dance brings people together in a community. I think dance breaks down barriers of self confidence," She adds.

To explore dance in a new way, Mapes created, performed in, and documented *Guerrilla Dance Attack*, which brought the art of

modern dance to the streets of Tempe and Phoenix.

Dancers in Mapes' troupe were strategically placed in pedestrian venues, such as Mill Avenue. The dancers looked like they were shopping or having lunch, but when the music started, they danced – on the street, sidewalk, or in the cafe. This spontaneous expression of emotion and movement would frequently provoke on-lookers to get up and dance.

"I loved it when I would see a businessman in his suit get up and dance to the music, or the one old cowboy in his boots and jeans get up and dance," Mapes said of her thesis project. "I figured if people weren't coming to see dance, we would take dance to them."

It reminds me of the proverb, "We are fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well just dance."

We often worry we will look foolish, so we don't move, we don't celebrate the moment or the emotion. We never wonder whether our fear of looking foolish may actually be more foolish than our failure to live fully in the moment or the emotion.

Native Arizonan and professional dancer Wesly Feuquay, M.ED., thinks that we, as a Western culture, have gotten away from movement.

"We are drawn to dancing because we aren't meant to be as sedentary as we have become," Feuquay said. "It's very natural for the body to move."

Feuquay has danced professionally for 17 years and competes

internationally in ballroom dancing. He also teaches dance at the college level. With a background in psychology, he sees dance as ingrained in our social connectedness.

"The intuitive nature is in us to read bodies in motion, whether it's a healthy body, a sick body – I mean, you can tell someone limping from yards away," Feuquay said.

He goes on to explain that all ballroom dances have deeper cultural backgrounds than most people know.

"Anthropologists would be out discovering tribes and their native dances, bring them home and put them to 'modern music' of the time. These dances would get 'cleaned' up," Feuquay said of the Latin-based dances like the samba, mambo and cha cha, "[and] their tribal genesis [would be] all but forgotten."

"Whereas in Western Europe [dance has] more of a religious, spiritual background. The dancers are carried up, away from the floor, even in ballet," Feuquay said. "Looking at the more primal, tribal dances in South American or African countries, dance was expressed in a small, earthy and grounded way. There was probably less space to move in, yet in that tribal environment people were more free to express themselves," Feuquay said. Those dances were often more sexually expressive than their European and American counterparts, the waltzes and foxtrots.

Dance has always been about more than beauty and entertainment, and it can be just as much science as it is art.

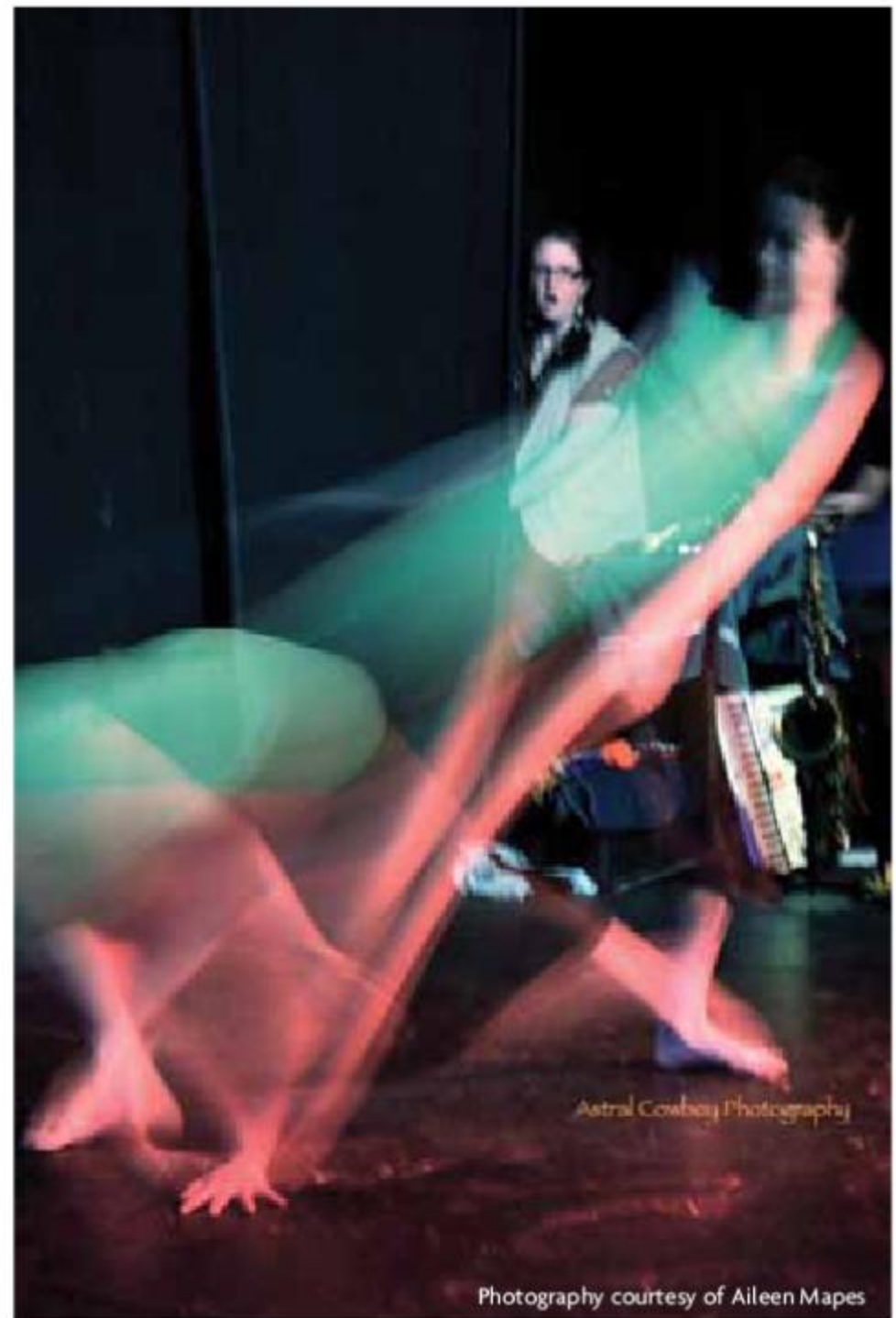
One company exploring that confluence is a collaboration of dancers, musicians and technology experts called UrbanSTEW (which stands for Safe Terrain for Experimental World), a non-profit organization that brings together experts in fine arts and technology.

Dancer and UrbanSTEW spokeswoman Jessica Mumford says the organization looks at how to make dance more useful and meaningful in society.

"We, as dancers, have a complex and deep understanding of movement," Mumford said. "We have such a detailed vocabulary of movement and we have this beautiful art form so we understand how people naturally move through space."

UrbanSTEW uses that knowledge and artistic insight to help technical experts find new solutions to engineering challenges involving mobile phones, software, and computer software.

Mumford, a 2009 Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts outstanding graduate of the year, sees her work with UrbanSTEW as using dance to help find solutions in disciplines as diverse as ergonomics and software development.



Photography courtesy of Aileen Mapes

UrbanSTEW is finding ways to make dance more vital in our society. Aileen Mapes' Guerilla Dance Attack created a way to take modern dance to the community. And Wesley Feuquay is teaching a new generation not only how to dance but educating about why we dance.

Dance is a form of expression, and your expression, for that matter. I say again, "We are fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well just dance." ■

SOURCES

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ustream.tv/channel/guerilla-dance-attack

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