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Cincinnati Ballroom Classic invites locals to enjoy art of dance

Contributed By: [Charles Pleiness](#)

On Aug. 16, approximately 200 ballroom dancers will gather here for the 8th annual Cincinnati Ballroom Classic, the city's only dance competition that draws crowds for its special theme nights with American and International dance flavor. Participants will dance nearly 4,000 entries during the three-day competition.

The competition is run by Mark Brock, an athlete-turned-ballroom dancer who has built a business out of bringing people together, and Bill Sparks, a ballet dancer-turned-ballroom champion and studio owner. They hope area residents will pop in to watch flair and style parade across the parquet.

"Dance is bigger than it's ever been in this country," says Brock, a Columbus resident who grew up in Detroit as a football star and later built a career in ballroom. Brock danced competitively while owning studios, until he transitioned from standing in the spotlight to shining it on others by hosting dance competitions across the nation. "Dance gives you opportunities to travel and make friends for life."

Sparks, a four-time U.S. Latin Champion, has been a dance instructor, studio owner and professional dance champion for 30 years. A native of Farmington, Missouri, he studied dance at the National Academy of Arts in Illinois and the Houston Ballet Academy before sustaining a back injury that ended his ballet career. Sparks also won at Blackpool in England during his performing career.

"Dance is an opportunity for kids to interact with others without devices and have fun while learning a skill and respect," Sparks says.

Participants at the Cincinnati Ballroom Classic, which began in 2011, thank Brock and Sparks for bringing everyone together in a supportive space. Area residents are invited to watch the competition all three days. On opening night, the Night Club challenge begins at 8 p.m. On August 17th, the competition begins at 9 a.m. and on August 18th, events begin at 8 a.m.

The event is open to the public and welcomes dancers and non-dancers curious to view the excitement and drama of live competition. Theme nights and special performances featuring ranked professionals and rising stars are scheduled during the evening events which begin at 8 p.m. on August 17th-18th. The competition features Rhythm, Ballroom, International Latin and Smooth dance styles with Pro/Am and Amateur Freestyles and ends with a "Taste of Cincinnati" party.

Maria Hansen, an official at this year's event, and her partner Nicholas Cotton will perform their award-winning "Toilet Paper" number, which brought them to win the 1997 Ohio Star Ball Ballroom Showcase.

Ballroom dance is popular in and around Cincinnati, which is home to a large number of gold-level dancers, particularly in the Smooth and Standard categories. Cincinnati also has a large social ballroom dancing community, where you can find at least one event going on every night. "For a city this size, ballroom dancing is pretty rich," says Dr. Marcia Bowling.