

# Texas Ballroom Country Competition Team

Welcome! I am thrilled to share with you my love of all things dance and to introduce you to the world of competitive country dancing. I am sure the people you meet and the memories you make with your classmates will be cherished long past your days at UT and it's my privilege and pleasure to escort you on this journey, but perhaps first, a brief introduction.

My involvement with Texas Ballroom, previously known as UT Ballroom Dance Club, has provided me with untold joy since my first involvement in the mid-90s. International style of dance was my first love in 1990, at the beginning of my dance journey. By the time I came to UT, having just retired from ballroom competition, it was wonderful to share my knowledge with club members by teaching a Standard class and a Latin class each week.

By the end of the '90s, I begrudgingly succumbed to the urgings of a dear friend to attend a local country competition, knowing full well I would never enjoy anything country!! Boy was I surprised, it was not like anything I was expecting! The dancing had great choreography executed by stylish dancers, it wasn't hokey at all! And the best part, everyone enjoyed social dancing and changed partners all night long! Such a fun way to get to know people from all over!

I didn't realize it then but I was embarking on a journey that would take me to where I am today. From that day forward I was consumed with a desire to understand country dance as well as I understood ballroom dance and I realized that competition would again be in my future. My efforts were eventually rewarded with a United Country Western Dance Council (UCWDC) Showcase World Title in 2001. Continuing my studies over the next few years led me to qualify and compete in the highest level of competition, the Masters division, and after retiring from competition, to earn the title of Master Judge. I travel regularly to competitions to judge, coach and dance with my students.

Working hard to achieve my goals in the world of country dance was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life and once those goals were achieved, I turned my attention to becoming a mentor, through Texas Ballroom, to anyone that was drawn to country dance. The world of country competition is a very accepting and welcoming community to anyone and everyone. The country dance family is especially happy to welcome our next generation and you will find them to be super supportive.

In the spring of 2016, Texas Ballroom formed a Country Competition Team and since then, our program has produced 13 World Champions with almost double the number of actual titles since many have won more than one title. I would love to help you become our next World Champion representing Texas Ballroom's Country Competition Team.

## --Competition Information--

### *General Info*

Two competitive circuits both begin their season in February

United Country Western Dance Council (UCWDC) [UnitedCountryWesternDanceCouncil.org](http://UnitedCountryWesternDanceCouncil.org)

Holds the World Championships in January for the previous year

American Country Dance Association (ACDA) [AmericanCountryDanceAssociation.com](http://AmericanCountryDanceAssociation.com)

Holds a National Championship in November for the current year

### Four kinds of competition available

Teams-group dancing

Line Dance-solo dancing

Couples-two partners of equal ability

Pro Am-student and teacher partnership

Although Pro Am is our most popular form of competition, I would really encourage people to compete in Couples and Pro Am as well as Line! Couples competition will give you the opportunity to have a steady practice partner to work on choreography and technique while Pro Am is a great asset because you can really focus on YOUR dancing while your pro is taking care of you!

The advantage of Line Dance is that the choreography can be learned independently from the videos available on the UCWDC website. Honing your skills in line dance will progress you much farther and much faster in your Couples and Pro Am competition.

## *Skill Levels-ACDA*

Pro Am  
Newcomer  
Novice  
Intermediate  
Advanced

Couples  
Division IV  
Division III  
Division II  
Division I  
SuperStars

Line Dance  
Newcomer  
Novice  
Intermediate  
Advanced  
SuperStars

## *Skill Levels-UCWDC*

Pro Am  
Newcomer IV-I \*\*  
Novice  
Intermediate  
Advanced

Couples  
Newcomer IV-I \*\*  
Division III  
Division II  
Division I  
Masters

Line Dance  
Newcomer  
Novice  
Intermediate  
Advanced  
SuperStars

### **\*\* UCWDC Syllabus Divisions**

Newcomer IV, III, and II in both Couples and Pro Am are syllabus divisions. Step lists and videos are available at <https://ucwdc.org/syllabus/>

## *Couples and Pro-Am Competitive Dances*

An overall placement requires five dances (below) but competing in all dances gives you a better chance to win

<u>UCWDC</u>	<u>ACDA</u>	<u>Five Required Dances for an overall placement</u>
Triple Two	Triple Two	Two Step
Polka	Polka	Waltz
Nightclub	Nightclub	One swing (East Coast or West Coast)
Cha	Cha	Two non-swing (Polka, Triple Two, Nightclub, Cha)
Waltz	Waltz	
Two Step	Viennese Waltz	
East Coast Swing	Two Step	
West Coast Swing	East Coast Swing	
	West Coast Swing	

## *Line Dance Competitive Dances*

	<u>Dances offered by Skill Level</u>
Rise & Fall	Newcomer level offers 3 dances
Pulse	Novice level offers 4 dances
Smooth	Intermediate and Advanced levels offer all dances
Cuban	
Street (for Open Divisions) Stage (for aged divisions)	

### **How can you afford the expense of competition?**

In 2015 I formed a 501 c3 non profit for the purpose of contributing toward competition expenses including hats, boots, costumes, dance fees and hotel accommodations. Amounts distributed each year depend on donations received the previous year. We have a website, [LoneStarDanceScholarshipFund.org](http://LoneStarDanceScholarshipFund.org), which has an archive of past seasons including photos and the accomplishments of those that came before you as well as a list of our donors. If you see them at a comp, be sure to thank them and ask them for a dance!

Scholarship fund recipients are expected to attend group classes regularly as well as devote additional time to working one on one. In addition, I will come to campus early to work one on one with students. I am also available at my home studio for anyone that wants to make the trek out to the lake. Oftentimes, students will spend a weekend or a long day at the house for coaching and practice time.

To minimize expenses, competitors are expected to volunteer at each competition in exchange for their weekend pass. We also focus on events that are drivable. The following are the events the club attends every year:

Ft Worth Hoe Down (ACDA)	mid/end March
Oklahoma Dance Fest (UCWDC)	mid/end April
Texas Classic (UCWDC in Austin)	mid/end May
New Orleans Mardi Gras (UCWDC)	mid/July
LoneStar Invitational (ACDA in Austin)	mid August
Waltz Across Texas (ACDA in Houston)	mid October
Dallas Dance Festival (UCWDC)	early November
ACDA Nationals (2 qualifiers required)	mid November
UCWDC World Championships (3 qualifiers required)	early January

## **Let's get started!**

Classes on campus are on Tuesday evenings from 6-8 for Two Step and WCS lessons, focusing on some fun and socially lead-able amalgamations. Tuesday from 8-10 offers extra time to focus on technique and basic patterns in any of the competitive country dances. We also discuss fundamental dance technique like connection, turn technique, arm styling and musicality. We focus on what it takes to become the best dancer you can be, always remembering that it's not WHAT you do, it's HOW you do it! The Thursday class will be Two Step and West Coast Swing,

Showing up for class regularly will guarantee that you will progress fastest! My teaching style is organized around the rules of body mechanics and how they apply to partner dancing, which of course applies to ALL partner dances (including ballroom!!). I will divulge to you all of the rules you need to know to control and enhance your progress. Remember, the only thing it takes to become the best you can be is good information and a willingness to practice!

## **Choreography**

Now it's time to prepare for a competition. As soon as you start thinking about attending a competition, it's time to start thinking about the material you will be presenting in your performance which will be 90 seconds long. If you are brand new, then complicated choreography is not ideal for leaders. A better path would be to take familiar patterns and clean up the technique and create small amalgamations, four or five groupings of three or four patterns that work well together. I have many hours of choreography, music and competition video in a Dropbox account that I will be happy to share with you. The goal is for the leaders to learn how to lead so that they can enjoy dancing in a social venue. As their competency grows, a routine is slowly introduced until there is a fully choreographed routine. For followers, the approach can be quite different as your pro will be able to lead you through much more difficult material. Your focus will be on using good technique and styling.

As soon as choreography is incorporated, leaders and followers would be encouraged to practice their choreography as though it was a line dance. Muscle memory will be developed which will help you remember your part without your partner. I promise you will feel so much more confident on the competition floor when you know you are well rehearsed, whether you're a leader or a follower!

For couples, the followers will have to default to the skill level of the leader, always keeping in mind that giving him time to develop his basic skills will pay off very quickly! And followers, this is your opportunity to really focus on technique since your material could be simpler in Couples than in Pro Am until the leaders get some experience. Leading is very difficult and it takes time to develop expertise, I encourage followers to try leading as soon as they start to feel frustrated with their partner!

## **Practice Time**

Now that you are developing your competition material, it's time to practice, practice, practice! The only way to develop the necessary muscle memory is through regularly repeated, slow, thoughtful, consistently correct practice. A few minutes several times a day is much more beneficial than an hour once a week. Remember, practice makes permanent, so be thoughtful about what you are practicing and check in regularly to be sure you aren't practicing something that you will eventually have to unlearn!

Make sure to practice your entrance and exit from the dance floor. Your performance begins the moment you step on the floor and you will feel more comfortable when you have practiced how you will present yourself.

In addition to our regular class time, I come to campus early for extra coaching. I would prefer to work with the newest students in a group setting as I have many things to say that I would rather say to everyone at the same time. As you progress we will schedule more time individually as that need becomes clear. Also, you are always welcome to come to my house for extra practice time and coaching. Additionally, I offer a WCS class at my house at 2 on Sunday and sometimes cook something for dinner!

## **Before the competition**

Confirm with the Country Team Captains all arrangements for the upcoming competition. Hotel reservations should be made as early as possible to take advantage of reduced group rates before the room block is sold out. Registering for the event before the early cut off date can save money so keep that date in mind.

Make sure to gather all of your costumes before it's time to pack, don't wait till the last minute to notice repairs that are necessary, boots that need to be shined, soles that need to be glued, or to collect anything that is missing. For guys, storing your hat in a cool dry location will help keep its shape much longer. If you notice your hat is starting to look droopy, there are several places in town that will shape your hat for little or no cost and there is often a vendor at the competition that will shape your hat for you. For ladies, make sure you have dance briefs and stockings with no runs as well as anything you will need for hair or makeup.

Don't forget to pack your favorite foods especially snacks you can eat during long sessions. At a big event a session can be four or five or six hours long. Also be aware that hotel food is not always available and is often very expensive. Bringing food from home can help ensure that you stay well fed! On Sunday afternoon I like to take everyone out to eat whenever it is possible! This is a great time to reflect on a fun weekend and share your memories with your fellow competitors.

### **At the competition**

Make sure to have your hotel confirmation number handy to avoid problems when you check in at the hotel registration desk.

Once you check in to your room, the competition registration desk should be your next stop. It will be located either inside or directly outside of the ballroom. They will have a wrist band to allow entry to the ballroom and your competition number. This number will be pinned to your costume for competition. You will also be given a weekend schedule which will list the starting time for your session as well as a recap of everything you are dancing. Review this sheet for correctness!

Next, check in with the Volunteer Coordinator to receive your volunteer assignments. Volunteers are expected to be punctual and to go 'above and beyond' to help out when asked. Organizing a three day event is EXHAUSTING (I did it for 15 years!) and the event director will be forever grateful to have volunteers that are ready to help when needed. One thing to keep at the top of your thoughts, when we travel as a group, what I do will reflect on all of you.....and what you do, will reflect on me. Let's keep that in mind always!

Being in the ballroom early for your competition session will always work to your advantage! Get a feel for the floor and for the leaders, mark your choreography so you know where your best starting place is since every dance floor has the potential to be a different size.

This is also a great time to find the heat sheets which will be taped to a wall in the ballroom. Those heat sheets will tell you which heat you are in for each dance. Keep track of your heat numbers during the competition. I will be in the ballroom unless I tell you I have to leave but I expect my students to keep track of the heat numbers and to let me know when our heat is near.

Warm-ups will begin at the time listed on the schedule. You need to make a decision as to whether you will dance warm-ups in your costume or in practice clothes. If practice clothes, give yourself enough time to change into your costume before your first heat. During warm-ups, the DJ will play a short cut of music for some or all dances. Warm-ups can vary greatly from competition to competitions. You can always ask the DJ how the event director has instructed them to handle warm-ups. This is a great time for working out the kinks and identifying any problems which can then be remedied after warm-ups so take note of them. Warm-ups can be the most stressful part of the competition because everyone is on the floor at once and jockeying for position so don't let that freak you out! Your pro is always looking out for you to make sure you don't run into anyone and no one runs into you! Now for couples, you'll both have to be paying attention!

Make sure to keep track of when your teammates are competing. It's always wonderful to hear the cheers of your supporters when you're out there working hard!

### **Awards**

Keep track of when awards will be given for your session as there are several different ways that awards can be scheduled. Also, make sure I'm aware so that I can be sure to be there at the appropriate time! At a competition, I have many hats to wear and many responsibilities which means your help is greatly appreciated in keeping me informed!

Remember, your placements are only an indicator of where you are at that time, a marker for improvement. It's really the end of year competitions, a National and World title that we are striving for! Each competition will give us a roadmap for improvement toward achieving that goal, an accomplishment no one can take away from you. TxB Country Competition Team has produced 13 World Champions.....do you want to be #14?!

### **Unwanted advice**

It's easy to say the wrong thing, let's just start with that! When someone walks off the dance floor having just given it their all, they probably don't want to hear much about what they've done wrong, even a seasoned competitor would rather luxuriate in their sense of accomplishment after their performance rather than having someone point out something that was wrong which they are probably already aware of!

If you truly have some constructive suggestions, please be sensitive as to when they are delivered. Also know that you may find yourself on the receiving end of unwanted suggestions. Try to smile and nod and say thanks ever so

much, regardless of what they are saying. Most everyone speaks out of love, but it's not always easy to see that through the emotions of competition!

### **Wins and Losses**

There will be more losses than wins so it's best to prepare yourself mentally in advance of a competition. In both Couples and Pro Am, you will be awarded a grade or a medal based on your technical expertise in that dance. In Pro Am, medals are Bronze, Silver, Gold, Gold with Honors and Gold Graduate. Silver is considered "average". In Couples, letter grades range from C to AA, B being "average".

Remember, you are really competing against your last set of medals. Which dances have you improved in, what dances need improvement? Your medal grade is totally in your control; your placement in any particular competition is not. You have no control over how much natural ability your competition has, how much they practice, or what their background is that might give them an advantage. You only have control over how much you work toward achieving your goal and the goal is always to be the best that you can be. Most years at the World Championships when the top 5 in each division are announced, you will hear that all 5 received Gold Graduate medals in all of their dances!

Also remember, your fiercest competition is probably going to be one of your fellow TxB members, so remembering to be gracious will be very important. We will support each other, cheer for each other and dance our fiercest against each other while remaining great friends before and after the awards are announced.

It's thrilling for me to share this journey with you. And please know, dancing aside, I am always available to lend an ear no matter the time of day or night, no matter what the subject. I will always have your best interest mind, keep your confidences and I'll always be on your side!

*~Sherry*