

**Palo
Alto**

Vol. XXVII, Number 98 • Friday, September 8, 2006 ■ 50¢

Palo Alto Weekly
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Weekly

Weekend Edition

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Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, movies and more, edited by Rebecca Wallace



Nicholas Wright



Nicholas Wright

Top: What's bigger: her smile, or her cowboy hat? Hedy McAdams leads a group of students through some line dancing moves at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Palo Alto. Left: Shelly Gordon of Palo Alto, left, joins in the dance.

The dance, choreographed by McAdams and christened "Love Letters," is a slow, gliding creation.

The Palo Alto dancer is pretty darn modest about her elegance. Really, she says, it's all in the cowboy boots.

"Mine were stolen once, and I freaked out," she says.

Rubber-soled exercise shoes, with a scuffing tread and no ankle support, leave her cold.

"I went to Jazzercise once, and I fell over," she adds. She looks embarrassed, then bursts into laughter at herself.

McAdams has no trouble kicking humor — or a little attitude — into her dances. "Love Letters" was inspired by Elvis Presley's plaintive song of the same title, but it also pairs nicely with Tra-

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Rhapsody in boots

Local lawyer brings elegance to country line dancing

by Rebecca Wallace

Deana Carter croons "Strawberry Wine" from a portable stereo, and Hedy McAdams has the floor to herself.

With supple steps and an easy waltz rhythm, she makes a church room feel like a magnolia-scented backyard dance. She's got ballerina posture and a cowboy hat. She points her toes.

This is country line dancing, but no one's hootin' and hollerin'.

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FRANCIS JUE

Line dancing

(continued from previous page)

vis Tritt's "Here's A Quarter." ("Here's a quarter: call someone who cares.")

Also, many of McAdams' dances are feistier, packed with perky fast turns and shuffles and rock steps. In her choreography for the dance "Brown-Eyed Girl," she notes, "Dancers may enjoy adding shoulder shimmies."

Her students respond with equal enthusiasm. McAdams has a loyal bunch taking the two weekly dance classes she teaches in Palo Alto. Even though the new sessions haven't started yet, last week she had no trouble rounding up 10 pupils for a demo for a Weekly reporter.

Grinning and confident, they showed off several dances, following patterns choreographed by McAdams and others. All the while, they were moving in lines across the glossy floor at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Palo Alto. As shy folks know, one of the best parts of line dancing is that no partner is needed.

"She's awesome," student Francine Roy says of McAdams afterward. "Her style, the way she bites off each dance in itty-bitty bits. It's easy to memorize. And she's funny and makes everyone comfortable."

McAdams is a woman who has to have a sense of humor. A Stanford Law graduate, she has a day job that can be painful and messy: divorce mediation. Usually, the clients have already decided to split, and she's just helping finalize everything in a "less caustic way."

"It really wears you out. The dance feeds me back," she says.

Fittingly, she praises dancing as a good activity for singles, as they don't need partners. Or, if they dare to enter the fray again, they might pair up with someone during her country partner-dancing class.

Willowy in her jeans, McAdams could easily be a former teenage rodeo princess. But sometimes you gallop into things later in life.

About 15 years ago, McAdams had been taking ballroom-dancing classes when she wound up at a country-western event in Redwood City one night. Suddenly, she says: "I saw this couple glide across the floor. And I followed the woman into the bathroom, and asked, 'What is this (dance) and where can I learn this?'"

She had fallen in love with the Texas Two-Step.

Things moved quickly after that. Just six months after McAdams started taking line dancing classes, she was asked to help with the teaching. She discovered she had a knack for choreography.

"I had had no teaching experience. This was an amazing gift," she marvels.

A whirlwind followed. In 1996, McAdams' dance "Fly Like A Bird," inspired by a Boz Scaggs tune of the same name, soared to popularity in New Zealand, of all places.

The dance (which, interestingly, can also be done to C+C Music Factory's "Gonna Make You Sweat") topped the line dance charts in New Zealand for 39 straight weeks in 1996-97. It only got knocked out of first place by McAdams' "Love Letters."

How did her dances get down under? Apparently a Bay Area dance teacher went on a trip to Australia and taught "Fly Like A Bird" to some dancers there. It took off and became a favorite in Britain as well.

As a result, the lawyer from Palo Alto took off on dance-teaching tours in Australia, New Zealand, England, Wales and Canada. "It was wonderful going to countries and being treated like a celebrity," she said.

These days, in between teaching and taking her students on field trips to the Saddle Rack country nightclub in Fremont, McAdams is promoting the health benefits of line dancing.

Besides enticing folks to exercise and socialize, line dancing can also keep the brain active because dancers must learn and remember steps, McAdams says. It's an appealing message for her students, many of whom are in their 50s, 60s and even 70s.

McAdams has been researching the topic of dancing warding off dementia, and hopes to write an article about it. Recently, she led dance lessons at Stanford Sierra Camp's Healthy Living Retreat for Women.

Overall, she hopes to keep filling up people's dance cards, even those of people who think they can't move, or who shy away from country music.

McAdams shakes her head affably. "Before you know it, they're buying the boots." ■

What: Country line dancing classes taught by Hedy McAdams: Line Dance Plus (line dance) and Honky Tonk Special (couples and line dances, taught with Rick Evenskaas)

Where: Line Dance Plus is at Cubberley Auditorium, 4000 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. Honky Tonk Special is at All Saints' Episcopal Church, 555 Waverley St., Palo Alto.

When: Line Dance Plus is eight Fridays beginning on Sept. 15: basics taught from 11 a.m. to noon, and styling and execution taught from noon to 1 p.m. Honky Tonk Special is six Tuesdays beginning on Sept. 19, from 7:15 to 8:45 p.m.

Cost: Costs vary; see McAdams' Web site for details.

Info: Go to www.danceadventures.com.

About the cover:

Judy Cook of Palo Alto beams during a country line dancing demonstration led by Hedy McAdams. Photograph by Nicholas Wright.