

Economist & Sun/Sun-Tribune

DIVERSIONS

Strictly ballroom

Dancing brings couples together, gets singles to mingle

BY LINDA JOHNSON
Staff Writer

Every Saturday morning, Jane Teng and Horace Lee face the music and dance.

With only a week to go before their wedding, the couple has been meeting Saturday mornings at a dance studio in Richmond Hill to work on their waltz.

Now, at their third lesson and the steps down pat, they are putting the finishing touches on their style.

They want to make sure, whatever happens, whatever the future brings, their first dance will be perfect.

"It prepares us for the wedding and it's comforting to know (we can do it)," Ms. Teng said, adding the lesson also provides a chance to spend time together.

"The wedding is quite stressful and this helps relieve the stress. It's a nice break."

While there's an obvious incentive for people about to tie the knot to know how to spin their partners around the room, these days it seems a lot of people want to learn to dance the old-fashioned way.

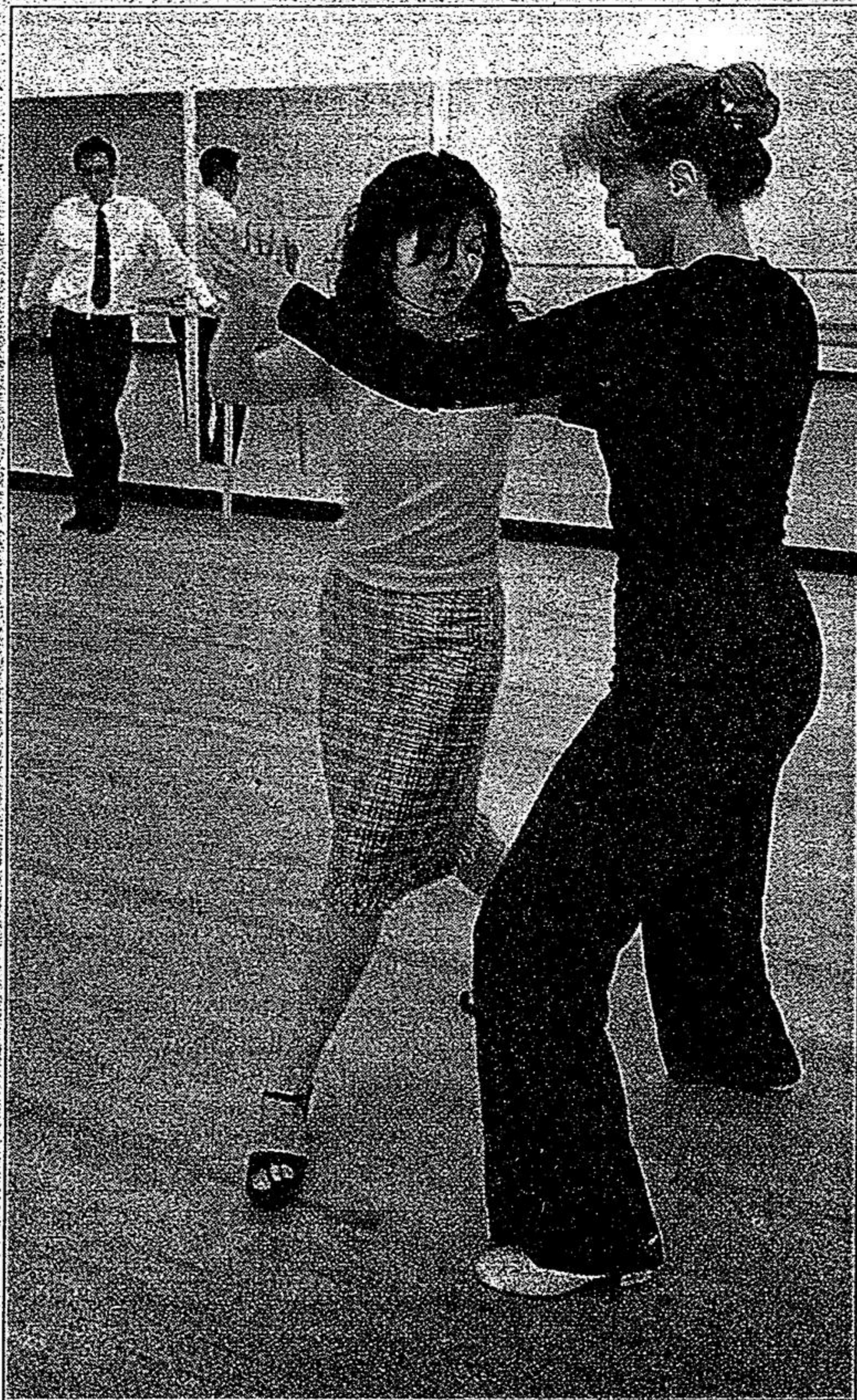
Indeed, Ms. Teng and Mr. Lee took their first steps at university dance clubs and ballroom dancing is becoming more popular among their friends.

Latin dances, especially salsa and meringue, are common at nightclubs. Some even provide quick lessons.

Their dance teacher, Amalia Dina, owner of Dance Art in Richmond Hill and 1992 International DanceSport competition champion for Romania, said demand for classic dance is increasing from young children to those in their 50s.

Parents want their children who go mostly for Latin dances, to learn something other than hip hop. Older people want to learn because they like it.

"They think it's enjoyable. They



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Amalia Dina (right), director at Dance Art in Richmond Hill, shows Jane Teng some steps as fiance Robert Lee looks on. Demand for classic dance is increasing from young children to those in their 50s, Ms Dina said.

used to dance a long time ago and they want to continue," she said.

The term ballroom dancing refers to three kinds of dances:

- Standard dances such as the English or slow waltz, the Viennese waltz, tango, foxtrot and quick-step.
- Latin styles including the cha cha, samba, rumba, jive and paso

doble (flamenco) and; Disco or club style — mambo, salsa, swing, meringue and hustle.

Ms. Dina, who has a civil engineering degree, began taking dance and choreography in high school.

Primarily a math and science student, she said she was hooked on dancing from the first time

she saw it.

"It seemed so different and elegant," she said.

Students Rosario Maira and Katrina Li, who came separately to Dance Art about five months ago, but found compatible partners in each other, said dancing has far-reaching benefits.

"This is my kind of activity. When you dance, you forget all your worries. I do a lot of other sports, but they don't have that effect. When I dance, I forget about everything," said Mr. Maira, who decided to take up dancing again when he saw the studio sign.

"When I walk down the street, I just go through the steps in my mind and I forget my worries. Dancing is in your blood. Either you have it or you don't."

Ms. Li, who was prompted by an advertisement, said dancing is a great source of exercise.

"It's good for the mind and good for the body. Friends recently told me I'm younger-looking. I know I'm happier than before. I'm so cheerful. That's from inside you," she said.

Besides wanting to know how to dance for weddings and honeymoons, many young people realize dancing is something they can do together all their lives, said Aaron Brown, co-franchisee of Arthur Murray Dance Studio in Woodbridge.

For many years, there was an emphasis on activities couples could do apart, he said. Now, they want to find ways to share time.

"Dancing allows people to set a date when they know they will be in each others' arms and in the company of other people who like to dance," he said.

Among young people, Mr. Brown added, the demand is mainly for Latin and other dances that can be done at clubs.

For single people, it is a socially-acceptable way to meet others, far less conspicuous than going to a bar.

"If you dance well together, you know there's some chemistry, some excitement. It's a good ice breaker," he said.

For older people, who may

See DANCING, page 19.



Ron Csillag

Faith

Sharia law OK, but go slow

I'm willing to bet not since the murderous 18-hour days spent devising Bob Rae's social contract has former NDP attorney general Marion Boyd encountered such a maelstrom as in her current task.

Ms. Boyd, readers may recall, has been appointed by Premier Dalton McGuinty to review Ontario's 1991 Arbitration Act. It's a sleepy bit of legislation that has arisen, Frankenstein-like, in light of a request by some Muslims to use it in order to operate their own binding legal tribunals using (but not always) sharia, or Islamic law.

I'm going to go out on a limb here, partly because the view is better from there, and endorse these panels, but with some provisos. I hope they help Ms. Boyd arrive at a solution everyone can live with.

OK, maybe not everyone. For little has raised as much ire and fear as last year's announcement by the grandly-named Islamic Institute of Civil Justice (IICJ) that it plans to provide arbitrators trained in both Islamic and Canadian law to settle inter-Muslim disputes in Ontario.

Sadly, criticism has included some truly stupid and racist takes on the issue, mainly from fearmongering American bloggers as well as from one hysterical letter writer to the National Post, who suggested approval of the bodies would trigger a mass "exodus" from Ontario comparable to the one from PQ-governed Quebec.

I'm not suggesting these panels would be innocuous. There is valid criticism to be made of sharia as practised in some parts of the world and where it is the only law.

And women are right to worry they

See ADULTERERS, page 21.

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