

Dance Shoes vs Street Shoes

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Many dance studios have a "no street shoe" policy for their dance floor. Though this comes as no surprise to the experienced dancer, it might be a new concept for the beginning ballroom dancer. The following is provided for those who might not understand the importance of such a policy.

Serious dancers purchase dance shoes and use them exclusively for dancing on properly-maintained dance floors. They often have a second pair of shoes for use in venues with poor-quality, dirty, wet, or waxed floors; even a small spot of any liquid on the floor can severely reduce the effectiveness of a chrome leather sole.

Wood and non-waxed smooth floors, including varnished wood, tile, composite, and other smooth, clean surfaces deserve the best dance shoe with a leather sole, preferably chrome leather. A second choice would be a comfortable dress shoe with a smooth leather or composite sole. Women's shoes often have smooth, non-leather soles, but this is unusual in men's shoes. Leather-soled dress shoes are a good second choice for men.

Wax, whether on varnished wood, tile, or painted concrete is indicative of a bad dance floor. Some dance venues even put powdered wax in a corner for people with substandard footwear to "wax up" occasionally. The result can be substantial wax and grit build up. Such floors are also indicative of an atmosphere more conducive to drinking than dancing. Unfortunately, many public ballrooms, especially those that cater to a drinking crowd, use this strategy to accommodate the casual, improperly-shod customer. A "waxing corner" is a sign for the serious dancer to go somewhere else.

Waxed floors are one of the many reasons that ballroom dancers have migrated to the studios, electing to pay a substantial entrance fee to avoid drinkers with the related spills and enjoy a quality dance experience on a clean, high-quality dance floor.

Even if you dance in ordinary street shoes, have one pair used exclusively for dancing, or at least carefully clean your choice for the evening, perhaps even sanding the soles lightly before attending the dance, and carry the shoes in rather than wear them off the street. This insures that you don't bring in grit that damages the floor and aggravates other dancers.

Bars and night clubs make their money on food and liquor sales, thus they must accept whoever walks in, footwear notwithstanding. They often care little about the floor or its condition for dancing. Dance studios make their money with their floor, thus the floor is a high priority. The floor is a high priority for their customers as well, and serious social dancers consider the quality of the dance floor a priority when selecting a venue. Expect and respect efforts by a ballroom or studio to provide all dancers with a quality dance surface.

Dance Studio Policies often forbid the wearing of street shoes on their floors, and many provide separate areas for changing footwear. Though some go so far as to restrict all street shoes, most will accept street shoes if they are free of outside grit and do not leave marks on the floor. Some might even avoid a confrontation if you wear street shoes into their dance area, but realize that even if the proprietor might not mention your inappropriate footwear, some dancers might take offense and avoid

you as a dance partner, perhaps assuming that if you don't care enough to acquire appropriate footwear, you likely don't care enough about the sport to be an acceptable dance partner.

Your footwear makes the connection between you and the dance floor. If you care about dancing, you will care enough to acquire appropriate footwear and use it responsibly.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Recommendation. Consider three pairs of dance shoes:. 1) chrome leather soles on a quality dance shoe for use in studios and on the best dance floors, 2) a comfortable pair of street shoes with a smooth leather sole, to be used almost exclusively for dancing on floors that don't quite deserve your best shoe, 3) a pair of shoes with a smooth, synthetic sole for use where you might encounter water or other liquids. A pair of comfortable practice shoes is also a good addition.

Moccasins with a leather sole are some of the most economical dance shoes you can find, particularly for practice. If you find them comfortable, and don't care about fashion, they can be the best buy in a dance shoe that you will find. Some of my private students will tell you that I have often greeted them at the door with my moccasin slippers and never remembered to change to my dance shoes. I use them for practice about as much as I do my chrome leather dance shoes.

Dress Shoes. Many dress shoes are great for dancing, and some excellent dancers only use off-the-shelf dress shoes. Women often have the advantage of finding shoes with smooth, synthetic soles. Men generally have to get a leather sole to avoid some kind of texture that makes spins difficult. Though it is not necessary to purchase shoes specifically MADE for dancing, it is wise to purchase shoes that you use ONLY for dancing.

Shoe Bag. Find a bag that will hold your dance shoes plus accessories, such as a sanding pad, easily available at any hardware store and useful for removing the occasional "patina" that accumulates on the soles of your dance shoes.

Dance Surface. Unless you know the venue, check the floor before you change into your dance shoes. I often wear a street shoe that can serve as a bad-floor-dance-shoe just in case I arrive at a dance held on a poorly-maintained surface. Even ordinarily good venues sometimes neglect to clean up the spilled beer, stomped fries, and dropped gum from the previous night's pop rock, country, or polka dance, and, even if they did clean the floor, they might have left the "waxing corner" available, a sure sign that someone who doesn't know better, or who is too cheap to get a pair of decent dance shoes, will be spreading the stuff around all evening. If I decide to stay, that's when I rely on my dress shoes with synthetic soles.

There are two ballrooms in the region that are off my dance list no matter how good the band; they do not maintain their dance floor. The floor is coated with years of accumulated "patina" and the associated dancer's wax spread around to accommodate inappropriate shoes and floor neglect. (If you need wax on your shoes, you have the wrong kind of shoe or are in the wrong kind of place.) They seem only to sweep the floor and never to sand or scrape, thus leaving the patina to accumulate and aggravate dancers.

The only "wax-available" floor I ever recommend is at the Medina. They often put out wax for the

"drinking crowd" at rock and country dances, and they occasionally leave some in a corner for a ballroom dance. Fortunately they seem to clean the floor regularly, so it is usually in good dance condition.

"No Street Shoes" Policy at Dance With Me Studio

Dance With Me is the **ONLY** dance venue in St. Cloud where you **CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT** wear shoes off the street. Dirt, especially grit, poses a danger to the floor; **WATER POSES A DANGER TO THE DANCER**. It would be **UNETHICAL** and **IRRESPONSIBLE** for a dance studio with a clean, smooth floor not to have a "No Street Shoes" policy. Other venues care more about selling beer than they do their floor or their dancers, and the form of dance is such that a small amount of liquid on the floor poses little danger, especially when it is offset by the ever-present grit from shoes worn in from the street.

Not so at Dance With Me, where there is a wonderful, smooth, clean wood floor and where the dancers are expected to have clean footwear. The presence of **GRIT** will not only wear the surface, but large particles in small crevices on textured soles will catch and make deep scratches. Dirt eventually ruins the floor. Water can be even worse. Without the presence of grit, water will be absorbed into the soft leather sole of the dance shoe and cause it to grip unexpectedly on the smooth, grit-free floor. Water will serve as a lubricant for the smooth composite sole and cause it to slip unexpectedly. **WATER POSES A DANGER TO THE DANCER**. That is why dance studios with clean, smooth, wood floors do not allow street shoes on the dance floor.

Such studios also have carpeted changing areas from which observers can watch without endangering either the dance floor or the dancers and wherein dancers can change shoes so that they do not take either grit or moisture onto the dance floor. During the wet season, when it is difficult to come off the street without at least a bit of water and grit on our shoes, **PLEASE BRING CLEAN DANCE SHOES IN HAND RATHER THAN ON YOUR FEET, AND CHANGE SHOES BEFORE YOU ENTER THE DANCE AREA**.

If we do not respect the dance floor, we risk losing this studio as a place for public dances. Becky, owner of Dance With Me, has been generous to the dance community, and we should be kind to our fellow dancers and to her floor.