

All ages 'hustling' to join disco set

By Hattie Bernstein
STANDARD-TIMES STAFF WRITER

The men and women line up facing each other inside the Fairhaven VFW on Main Street.

There are about 40 people — short, tall, thin, heavy — dark-haired, red-haired, blonde, gray, white, balding.

Their faces are fresh, their dress casual.

Women wear flowered party dresses, flounced skirts or chinos and short sleeved tops.

For men, cotton or knit pants and short-sleeved sport shirts in prints or solid colors are the style.

Lee Terry, New Bedford dance instructor, is dressed in a flounced skirt and blouse of soft floral pastels. Her short dark hair falls in soft waves.

She climbs the small platform at the front of the hall, welcoming her students to their fifth session.

Tonight, the class will start with a Bus Stop Hustle to warm up. Then on to the Latin Hustle.

A woman with white curly hair smiles at her husband across the line. A pretty young girl arranges her stance and motions to her red-haired partner. The disc jockey turns on the stereo system and disco at the VFW begins.

There are no flashing lights here, no black lights or mirrors, no girls dressed in Danskin skirts and tights, no boys in three piece white suits.

This is a disco dancing lesson, not a disco.

To dance the hustle in a disco club, you have to first learn, then practice and practice and practice.

That's why they come to the hall every Thursday evening to practice with Mrs. Terry from 8 to 10 p.m., then dance their feet off until midnight.

When the music begins, a woman in her 60s wearing a pink flowered dress, faces her partner, also in his 60s and impeccably dressed. They get the rhythm quickly, their bodies enveloped by the beat which their feet tap out.

For others, the music dispels sleepiness. Feet start tapping and bodies arch toward the dance floor. The

beat works better than amphetamines, to lift the spirit and motivate the limbs into movement.

One and-a-two, three-four, five, six. One two, three-four, five, six. The beat is quick and syncopated. It's up-tempo with a lot of feeling. The white-haired woman and her husband are counting. Their hands and arms move together in slightly exaggerated swings as they tap out a song by Tavares. "Suddenly you're in my life/Here in my arms I found my paradise/My only chance for paradise."

Women whose husbands or boyfriends would not be caught dead at classes, learn both the man's and woman's parts. When they go home they'll teach the men their parts and practice together, they say.

"You hold hands loosely," Mrs. Terry is saying. "Don't get a lock on your hands or she cannot turn anyway."

She says couples like holding each other. "Some say touch dancing came back because the kids got tired of dancing apart. 'Girls like to be held, to dance close,'" says the teacher. "It's reflected in the dress (at disco's); dressy clothes, high heels. Boys are dressing like John Travolta (star of 'Saturday Night Fever')."

"They enjoy it mainly because it gives them something to do other than sit around and drink. Young people are drinking a lot less than before they started dancing. You don't have the time to drink when you're dancing."

Mrs. Terry says the persons off the street cannot walk into a disco and start dancing. "Not really — the hustle — you should have some instruction. There's a definite way to do all the steps."

"The hustle is the first real new dance to come along since the cha-cha in the '50s. It will be around for a long time," she says.

Meanwhile dancing schools are thriving. "Dance studios were closing (in the '60s) because with free-style dancing there was nothing to teach. A few little old ladies went every week to learn ballroom steps. But in the middle '70s they started to pick up from a few people a month to 20 or 25 a week in some studios."

That craze is growing thanks to films like "Saturday Night Fever" and "Thank God it's Friday," says Mrs. Terry.

The appeal of disco cuts across age differences. Patricia Young, 54, a widow, is taking lessons with two friends and her 14-year-old son, Joe Demers. "My kids tell me I'm crazy, senile. They say I should be learning square dancing," she says, giving Joe a hug. "It's harder when you're older, to learn, but as I come each week, I keep learning. This is fabulous."

Three generations of the Roger Camire family of Fairhaven are at the hall to learn the new dances. "This is the second time we've come here. We've been taking lessons for about a year," says Mrs. Laurie Camire, 60. "It's just something we took up last year. I love it."

The Camire's daughter, Elaine Jason, 35 and her two children, Lisa, 15, and Scott, 14, were sitting together during break time. "Scott calls his grandfather the disco king," says Mrs. Jason.

The 62-year-old disco king says he never danced before last year. "It's excitement — good therapy — healthy. 'After you do a few hours of this you go home and sleep well,'" says Camire.

Debra Sylvia, 18, of Dartmouth and her friend Mark Blanchette, also 18, are practicing for disco nights at places like Albambra's in Westport. "Sunday nights we have her (Lee Terry) for a teacher at a New Bedford Portuguese Club," says Ms. Sylvia. "I started in September. He started a few weeks ago."

Earl Tripp, 36, of Dartmouth says disco lessons improved his marriage. "When you're married, after a while, she goes her way, you go yours. This was something we could enjoy together." Also, he and his wife enjoy dressing for the dance floor. "When you're dancing, you've got to dress the part."

In the VFW hall, the disc jockey is playing Tavares, Barry Manilow, the Bee Gees. This music is the key that opens a new world of steps, dips and

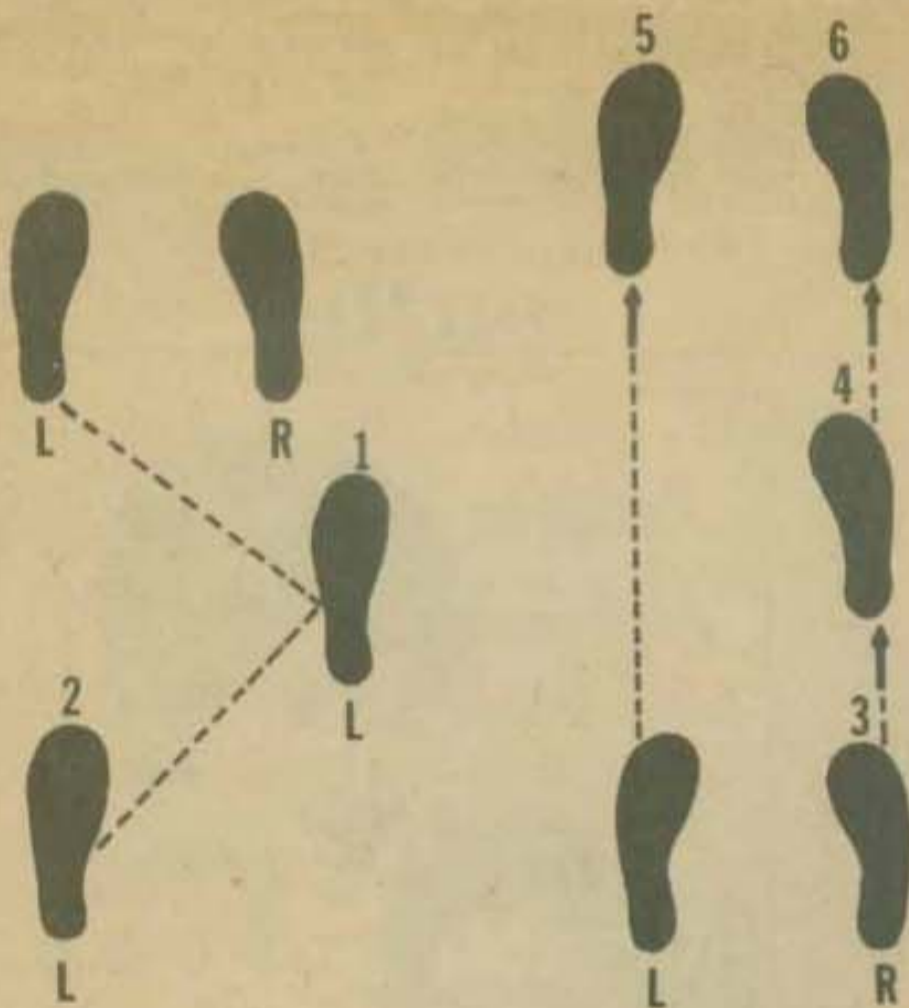
swings to disco dancers. There is an excitement charging through the dance floor, an energy con-

necting feet and legs, and arms and torsos in the music. And sometimes there is even ecstasy.

"Dance with me," goes one disco song. "Let your mind and your body be free. Dance with me."



S-T graphics Mello



The Latin Hustle

To do the Latin Hustle: Count 1,2 3&4, 5,6
Start with feet together. Man starts with his left foot. Woman starts with her right foot and reverses all steps.

Counts 1, 2

Start with feet together.

Count one. Tap left foot crossed behind right foot (no weight on tap).

Count two. Step left foot slightly backward.

Counts 3&4 5,6

Count 3. Step backward with right foot.

Count &. Bring left foot together with right.

Count 4. Step forward with right foot.

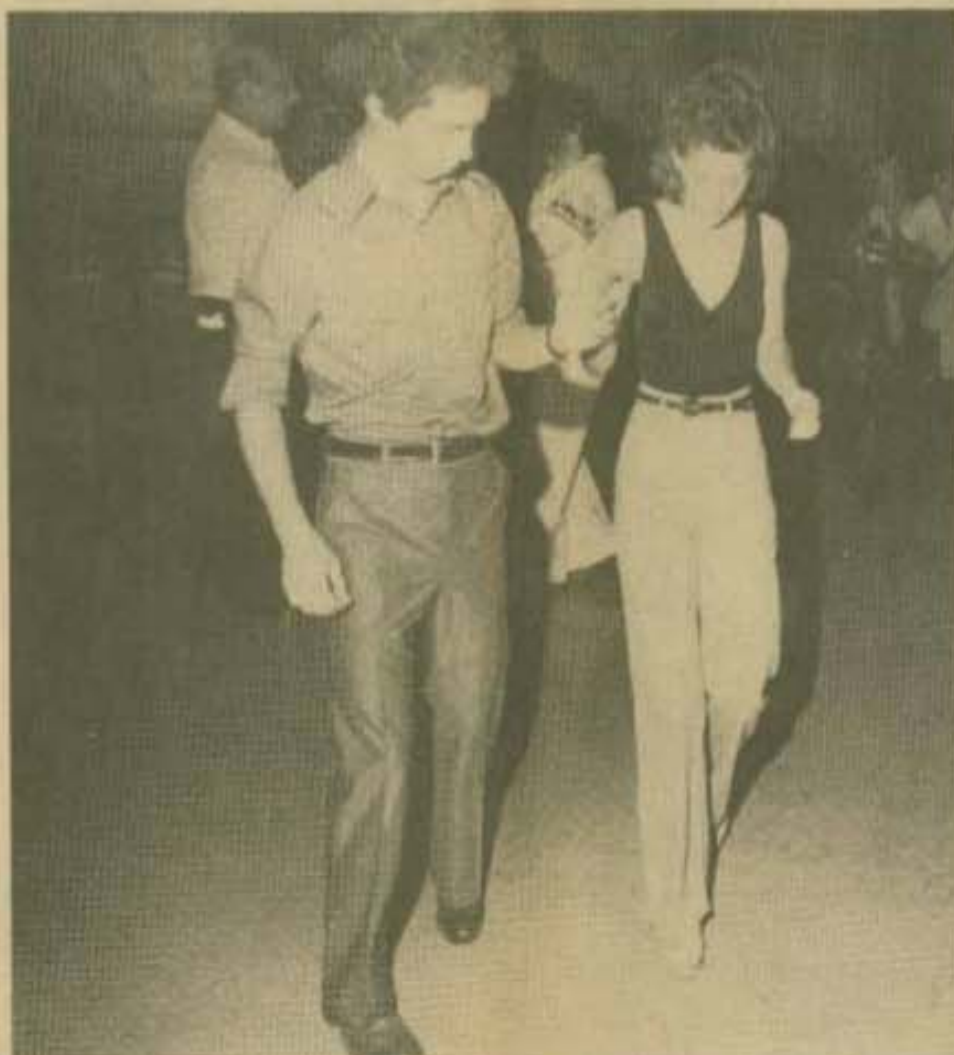
Count 5. Step forward with left foot.

Count 6. Step forward with right foot. Feet should be parallel after completing 5-6.

Counts 3&4 are done like cha cha cha.



Saturday night fever strikes all ages. A young couple hustles, while across the room a more veteran twosome execute a turn.



Lance Gunberg, 20, matches steps with his sister Martha, 17. The two attended weekly disco classes at the Fairhaven VFW. "I love to dance," says Martha.



Instructor Lee Terry demonstrates maneuver in Latin Hustle while students look on.

Staff photos by Hank Seaman