

## Ballroom and Bubbly in Castle Cary

Caroline Sherwood talks to dance teacher Paul Parsons of the Market House School of Dancing, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this month

If you're in Castle Cary this month, you might catch a glimpse of swishing chiffon through the upstairs windows of the Market House or hear the lyrical rhythms of a waltz, the jazzy strains of jive or the sound of popping corks. The 18th August marks a quarter of a century of teaching dancing in Castle Cary for Paul Parsons.

Paul attended his first dance class at 13. He liked football and felt silly dancing. "But there was a point when I suddenly discovered that I was getting the hang of it." By 15, he knew it was his life's work and he started studying ballroom technique seriously. Now he says: "If I

had to give up one type of dancing, I'd give up Latin. I adore ballroom dancing."

Paul's first teacher sent him to John Waine in Bristol with whom he studied for 15 years. Waine's teacher was the legendary Alex Moore (1901-1991), whose book is known as the 'bible' and Waine would refer to Moore as 'God'. But can you actually learn a step from a diagram on a page? "No," replies Paul, emphatically. "Dancing is a human activity and you need to learn it from another human; you need to feel it."

John Waine later sent Paul to study with former All England Professional Oldtime Champion, Julie Earnshaw. "He

was a brilliant, brilliant man but he was also aware that different people could offer things that he couldn't." Paul is visibly moved when he remembers his teacher: "In technical lessons with John, he would start with a question and that same question would take you down 20, 30 different paths every time you asked it, and you had no idea where it was going. John Waine has been a tremendous inspiration to me. As I've grown older I've come to appreciate what an incredible human being that man is."

In the last five years Paul's life has changed dramatically. "In the beginning,



Paul and Jane demonstrate the volcador in the Argentine Tango



Class concentration is intense while Paul Parsons demonstrates a step

because we were doing medal tests, I was so wound up with people getting their feet in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. I was tense and screwed up then and I didn't see dancing for what it was. It's only since we've stopped doing exams that I see it as something completely and utterly different – dancing is life! Particularly partner dancing: when it works and

you've engaged the same mindset, are working towards the same goal and both feeling it from the same place, there is no feeling that comes anywhere near it. It is just beautiful."

"Dancing should be available on prescription!" declares Anne Bragg, who also teaches at the Market House School, "it lifts the spirits, aches and pains are forgotten, problems which had seemed insurmountable slip away, and life is looked at from a different angle."

John, a retired widower, started ballroom dancing as he needed exercise for his legs, and the gym didn't appeal. "But the bonus – a real surprise – was the mental challenge, which has proved very demanding but it is wonderful fun."

Pat and Nigel are in their mid '50s. "I dance because it makes me smile," Pat says. "My husband dances because we did a deal – he'd dance if I cycled – I've been cycling for 30 years!"

John Docherty drives 15 miles to his lessons and is totally hooked: "It's a brilliant feeling when you are one with your partner and the music; it leaves you wanting more. Learning to ballroom dance has been one of the best things I have ever done."

Paul Parsons recognises that dancing, when you really engage with it, has the potential to take you beyond dancing: "Now I believe that all of that (technique) is leading you somewhere very different, because it gives you an understanding of your own body. It's cathartic. It's a vehicle for learning how to communicate with and understand yourself – and then with another human being. Everybody can dance, dancing is in every single one of us and rhythm is in every single one of us."

"After a busy, stressful week, dancing the Argentine Tango on a Friday night is very relaxing and gets rid of all the work-related stuff

buzzing round our heads," say Kate and Jim, both busy doctors. "It is also very good for our marriage," they say, "as it is the one thing we do that is about us and not the children."

"Argentine Tango is the mother of them all," Paul states passionately. "So simple and straightforward and yet so powerful. Turning my attention to ballroom dancing, I now see that everything can be communicated through the body, without the use of words, and I have learned that through Tango. It's so exciting." □

For details of classes, call 01963 351503



Alex Moore and Pat Kilpatrick

**In our dance editorial in the June issue of Somerset Life we inadvertently printed the incorrect class details for Tango West. We apologise for this. For the correct details of Tango West classes, call 0117 300 9876 or visit [somerset.greatbritishlife.co.uk](http://somerset.greatbritishlife.co.uk)**



Classes are held at the top floor of the Market House

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