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Folk dance club samples even polka

Written by Scott Koperski, NewsNetNebraska

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Students, seniors and plenty of people in between gathered together Saturday night to dance the night away, **polka** style.

The band, **Less Talk, More Polka**, provided the dance music for about 40 people, and dance they did. Many of the people in attendance at UNL's Culture Center are part of a folk dancing club that's been active for several years.

The dance club is little known, averaging only about eight people every meeting. But, even though few people know about this unique club, those who attend have a great time and become devoted to it quickly.

Mila Saskova-Pierce, associate professor of Slavic languages at UNL, demonstrated her **polka** dancing skills on nearly every song. During breaks in the action, she encouraged people to come to the dance club's meetings, which are at 7:30 p.m. on Fridays in Teacher's College Hall.

"Dancing puts you in certain moods," she said. "You can communicate without talking, and it reduces stress."

A dance full of history

Before the show started, Saskova-Pierce also shared the extensive history of the **polka** dance with the audience. **Polka** is a **Czech dance** that was created in the 1830s.

It reached its highest popularity in the 1840s and soon after, found its way to the United States. It wasn't as popular in the U.S. as it was in Europe until after World War II when it was **rejuvenated by Polish immigrants**.

There are several **variants** of the dance, depending on the region, according to the Polish Music Association of the University of Southern California. In America, the most common form of the dance is the Polish-American style.

Click here to see a YouTube video demonstrating the polka dance steps.

The folk dancing club teaches dances from all over the world, including Russia, Scotland and South Africa. For this reason, there is no permanent instructor. Whoever knows the dance is the person who teaches it, according to long-time member Enid Newman.

Saskova-Pierce taught the basic three steps of **polka** dancing to the crowd so everyone could dance to the music. She's been studying dances from around the world for years.

Newman said, "Folk dance is something that happens all over the world."

"Sometimes people will go to workshops, then teach it to the rest."

Newman, who has been going to the club meetings for **more** than 35 years, said that attendance varies

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from week to week with the different dances, but usually between five and 12 people show up. The club is open to both students and non-students.

Newman has been teaching dance for years and said she enjoys teaching college students most because they seem to pick the steps up the quickest.

"I just like to see people dance," Newman said. "I like to do it, and I like to teach them. It's always fun to teach college students."

Less Talk, More Polka

This week was Czech week on campus, and **Less Talk, More Polka** was happy to play a **polka** dance that was well received.

The band, which formed in 2007, usually plays a show in the Lincoln area about once every two weeks. Band members - most of whom are UNL students -- have been playing many shows lately in local restaurants and coffee shops, but this was their first ever dance, according to band leader, John Sens.

Sens, a senior music and environmental studies major, said, "**Polka** music is just fun to play."

The seven-piece wind band took two intermissions during the two-hour show but spent most of them dancing with the crowd to recorded music from a CD player.

Less Talk, More Polka has released two CDs in the last two years. A third, titled Heepin' Helpin' a **Polka**, is set to be released later this year.

Photos: Katie Stearns

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