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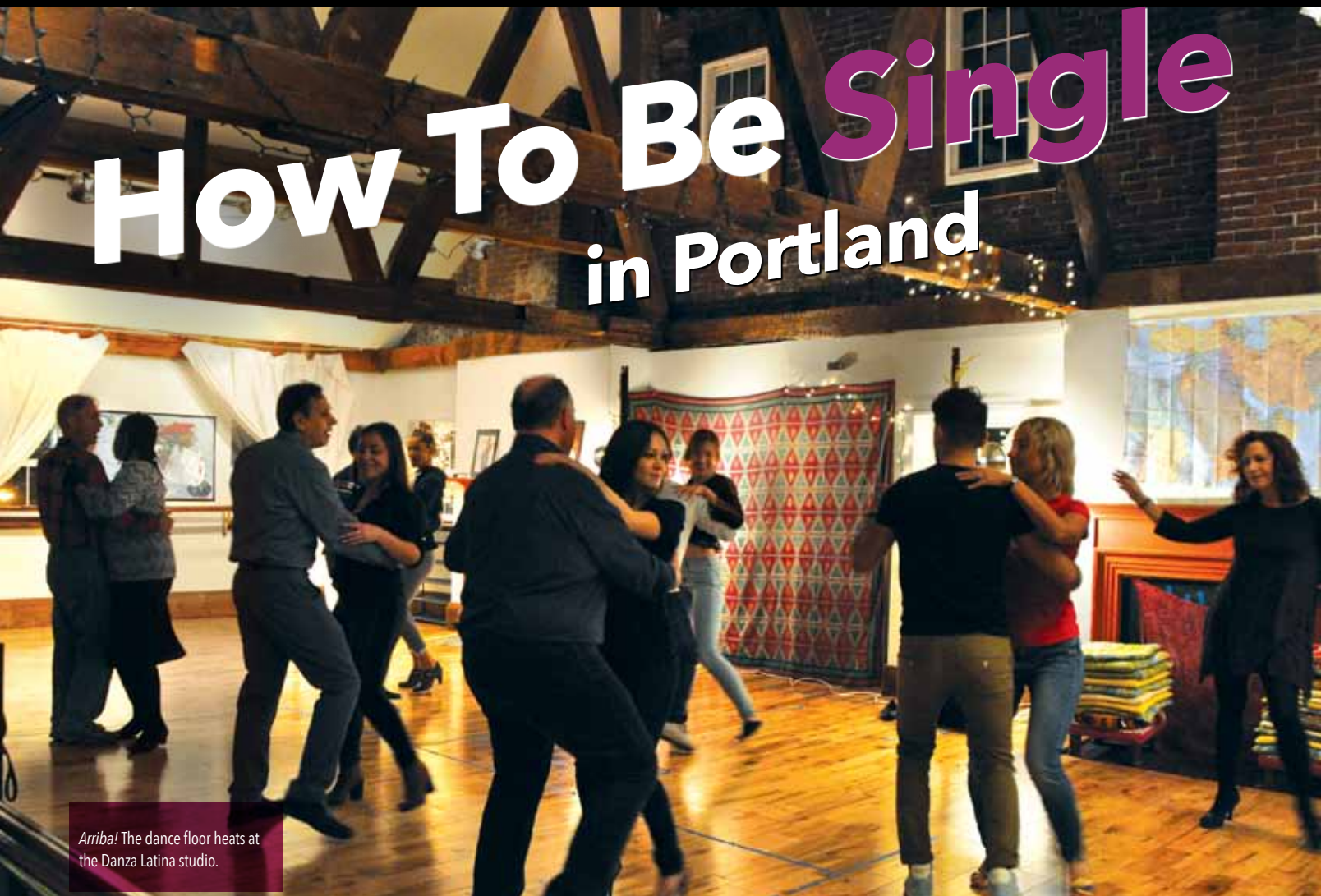


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How To Be Single in Portland



Arriba! The dance floor heats at the Danza Latina studio.

The **city at night** holds the promise of chance encounters on ice, **dizzying** dance floors, **mysterious** strangers, and perhaps even **romance**...

BY KAREN HOFREITER

IN THE 2016 ROMCOM *How To Be Single*, actor Dakota Johnson, reserved, chary, moves to Brooklyn and tries to navigate the luridly impersonal singles scene. She's a watcher, a thinker. And the audience is with her from the second she drops in casual conversation that she's from Maine... If you can relate to Johnson's wide-eyed voyage across the bars and clubs of a sparkling city, then chances are you're starting out 2017 single. And if you're in Portland, you're in good company. Over two-thirds of the city's adults are going it solo (according to data from bestplaces.net). As for where to find said company—well, thankfully for most, it does not have to involve skulking around loud, sweaty dance clubs you out-

grew a decade (or more) ago or attending awkward, singles-themed events where a pink raffle ticket gets you a complimentary plastic glass of Chenin blanc and a flurry of spectacular non sequiturs. The trick to avoiding such situations is to think outside the match.com box and follow the fun, where people are much too busy having a good time to waste it trying out corny pick-up lines.

SKATE DATE

Chilly temperatures, twinkling lights, and the high-risk potential for two people landing in a horizontal, face-to-face position are just some of the reasons the ice-skating rink is a beloved Hollywood romcom trope.

That is why an evening spent “accidentally” bumping into cute strangers at the **Rink at Thompson's Point** is the perfect strategic move for the single guy or gal. Get there early and watch the sun set over the Fore River before warming up with a craft beer in the cozy rustic yurt. If you happen to be a Boitano or Yamaguchi in the making, slyly offer a few pointers—or better yet, a warm

“Over two-thirds of [Portland's] adults are going it solo.”



Turner Classic MAINE

Since the movie *How To Be Single* is our point of departure for this story, we contacted Ben Mankiewicz, host of Turner Classic Movies, to take us closer to Maine in the movies as we engage a larger culture.

Is there a singular power of Mainers as main characters in film?

Ben Mankiewicz: It's funny you called me. I've just spent the morning interviewing Frank Darabont*. Naturally, Maine came up again and again.

But in a romantic comedy, in something like *How To Be Single*, why do you think the legendary screenwriting team of Abby Kohn & Marc Silverstein (*He's Just Not That Into You*) chose Maine as the home state for Alice, their lead character who's exploring the dating scene in Brooklyn? Is it because Maine is vaguely in vogue but still sort of 'parts unknown'?

BM: Hmm. If you hear something on the phone, it's the sound of me eating potato chips. What exactly do you mean?

If you went to Central Casting and asked for a young Maine woman as a female lead, what characteristics would she have?

BM: In a modern movie. Okay. I would look for that independence that somehow reaches beyond the screen. Let's start with Katharine Hepburn. I realize she's not from Maine.

We consider Connecticut 'greater Maine.'

BM: Yes, but in the New England sense, when I see Katharine Hepburn, there is a fierceness to her that comes across in just about every role. You can tell right away this woman is not like

the other women in the movie. You know, Anna Kendrick is Katharine Hepburn today. Who was it that just said that Anna Kendrick is the most talented woman working in Hollywood? Right now, if you were to make a list of the eight most talented actors under 50, there is no way she wouldn't be on the list. Like Hepburn she has a quality to her, no matter what the role is, that makes her instantly likeable—but you're not sure what she's going to do next. It doesn't hurt that she loves movies herself. You can tell that's true because she's visited us at TCM and one of her favorites is *The Women*. [Directed in 1939 by George Cukor, *The Women* features Norma Shearer, Rosalind Russell, Joan Crawford, Paulette Goddard, and Joan Fontaine.]

Yes, she's told us she once dreamed of being cast in the 2008 version. [The update of *The Women* features Meg Ryan, Eva Mendes, Annette Bening, Jada Pinkett Smith, and Debra Messing.]

BM: Lucky for her, she wasn't chosen to play in the new version of that movie.

Dakota Johnson is not from Maine. But she channels her Maine character's reticence, independence, integrity, and watchfulness in *How To Be Single*. In fact, as I watched the film, I wondered if the director had hoped to cast Anna Kendrick in the role but couldn't get her, and then it fell to Dakota to play Alice. 'Get me an Anna Kendrick type.'

BM: Yeah. I don't think I saw *How To Be Single*. But Dakota Johnson—she was in the train wreck that was *Fifty Shades of Gray*. After they saw it, the one thing people came out and said was she could be a pretty big star. She's not just beautiful. There's something else.

*Nominated three times for the Oscar, Darabont is deeply connected to the Maine mystique. The French-born son of Hungarian refugees from the Soviet incursion of 1956, Darabont moved to Los Angeles as a young child and graduated from Hollywood High. He wrote and directed both Stephen King's *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile*, both of which probe the extraordinary sense of Maine.



Slip and slide your way into romance at The Rink at Thompson's Point. Grab a drink at the yurt bar afterward and you've got the recipe for a perfect date.

and friendly hand—to a shaky newbie. Later, suggest getting to know one another better over a mug of hot chocolate in front of the glowing outdoor fire pit.

LATIN PASSIONS

If you prefer your meet-cute a bit warmer, try a salsa or bachata class at **Danza Latina**. Even if the steps won't exactly flow at first, the conversation will. "The purpose of all our classes is social dancing, not competition," says Anna Golendukhina, who owns the company with her partner, Lazaro Hernandez. "It's a very relaxing atmosphere. We laugh a lot, have fun." The classes are ongoing, so you can spontaneously drop in whenever the spirit moves you. Those seeking to meet someone of the male persuasion may find themselves at a particular advantage.

"In both classes for some reason there are always more men. They are there first and foremost to learn, and many of them are great dancers, but there's no denying



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the draw of the sexier aspects of the dances. Bachata, in particular, is romantic, with lots of body rolls to slow, beautiful music.”

COLORS OF LOVE

You don't have to be the artsy type (or the type looking for an artsy type) to enjoy a colorful and jovial evening at **Muse Paint Bar**. On a typical Friday or Saturday evening a youthful crowd (mid-20s to late-30s) of a few dozen aspiring *artistes* sets out to transform blank canvases into masterpieces worthy of Portland Museum of Art (or at least a bedroom wall). With the wine, beer, and creativity flowing freely, it's the perfect low-pressure atmosphere for bonding with a good-looking stranger over one another's astounding (or absent) talent.

“Customers feel a sense of camaraderie after just a few brush strokes. Adding some beer and wine to the mix also helps everyone come out of their shell, converse, and interact with their neighbors,” says owner Stan Finch.

HITTING THE RIGHT NOTE

If appreciating (rather than making) art is more your thing, there's plenty of the aural sort to be found at **Blue**, where patrons of a wide age range are treated nightly to live jazz, folk, Irish, roots, or rock music. The small, warm space lends itself to quiet, unassuming conversation (no shouting over a blaring DJ necessary).

“The atmosphere is always intimate and casual,” says Terez Fraser, owner. “But the music on stage does take the lead and sets the overall vibe. During a livelier set, there will be people sitting up front listening intently and people in the back socializing and even doing a little dancing.” The more introverted will especially find themselves at home here, where “the dimly lit room makes those who come alone feel more comfortable, as well as the fact that the focus is on the stage, not on who's in the room.” Translation: if you strike up a conversation with someone and very quickly realize he or she is: a) not interesting or b) not interested, you simply go back to being engrossed in the music as if that were the point all along. And even if you do end up hailing the last taxi on your own, you won't be able to deny that at least your ears had a darn good time. ■

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