

LARRY'S CORNER

Volume 1, Issue 3

Come and Dance with us

July 2002

Do you have a story or helpful hints for dancing? If so, write it down and give to Larry Ablin or Barb Johnson. We will add it to one of the

A person who loves West Coast Swing writes:

I belong to 3 dance clubs, Rebels, East meets west, and Minnesota, but not for long. The music that's played at East meets west and the Rebels, to me is hard to dance to, I go to the Bdale club and I don't want to leave the music is that good. Why don't the other 2 clubs wake up and see what's happening! It's the people that join as members that make the club. The music is bad, maybe you should talk to your DJ's

A Lady who's afraid to ask writes:

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Where are the nice guys who would come over and ask a lady to dance. I know of a few. I see ladies always asking. The gentlemen who do ask thank you and keep up the good work.

Why is it that all the Hi-tech Rebels sit in front and only dance among themselves. I've gone through all there classes, and only get asked at there student dances. Would like to hear on that. Are we not good enough for them or must we ask them?

Ladies footwork in WCS:

Depends on the speed and size of the step, and the syncopation that you're using. Slow steps should be grounded with a heel - flat - toe. Faster steps might require a low toe instead, running steps a higher toe.

BTW, in advanced WCS it is not a hard and fast rule that the woman always walks forward on her right on count 1. How about just a simple hesitation on 1? Or if man does double resistance, pushing the woman slightly back on 6 and then lead ON 1, she should hesitate (and if man doesn't lead until 1, she shouldn't come forward until "&2").

Besides your basic hesitation, there are several moves that have the woman in a lunge BACK to her right on 1 and then stepping forward on 2.

The difference between this and the "rock step" in ECS is that in the typical ECS, the woman's right shoulder is opening up over the right foot going back, while in WCS, if the woman lunges back to her right, it is usually either a straight back lunge without shaping the shoulders, or it is a right side explosion, and the woman is in a completely 90 degree rotation in a side lunge. She can do a back lunge to the left foot and then two steps forward on "&2". Or a back lunge to the right foot (you can't necessarily control which foot she lunges back to) and then a weight shift to the left on 2. Or a break ending that gets her left foot free and she starts forward on the left and takes walk-walk, walk-walk as 1-2, 3-4 to get her back on the correct foot). Or a the left foot scuff and scoot on 1&2.

There is an issue in West Coast Swing of whether the woman walks forward on one or hesitates until the "&" after one. Frankly, I think it usually depends on the lead. If the man doesn't lead until count "1" and the

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Ladies footwork in WCS continued

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woman is already coming forward, she's BACKLEADING. On the other hand, if the man leads on the "&" before 1 (6& or 8&), and the woman tries to take a hesitation, she's fighting him and will feel heavy to lead. What she needs to learn is to KEEP THE RHYTHM in her footwork. The man's lead will then determine her exact foot placement. This is a concept we try to apply regularly in our teaching. For example, what is the woman's correct footwork on a left side pass or underarm pass. Does she turn on beat 2? 2&? 3? 3&? 4? 4&? Guess what! Every single one of them works! Followers job is take a strong walk-walk down the slot and then do a triple step, wherever she may be. When she runs out of arm, she'll turn around. Simple. So the point is, depending on how long both partners arms are, how long their legs are, how big steps they take, how strong the man leads, etc., the turn of the underarm turn can be anywhere between "2" and "4&". We need to teach women to follow their partner, NOT the exact foot placement instructions that this or that instructor says is the "right" way to do it.

"Followers: In Swing, do not lean back on counts 3 and 4 of eight count Whips. There you should maintain a forward (atop of your feet) motion, not a leaning back motion. Leaning back wears heavily on a leaders hand and also throws the both partners off balance. Remember, it is up to you (follower) to travel out of the swing out, use your weight (being forward) to help you step and swing out quickly. Do not wait for the leader to pull you out.

Leaders: Remember that your hand is at her shoulder blade level, not down at her waist." There aren't any ribs there, and it's not pleasant to dance with a leader who is trying to rip your kidney out.

"Leaders, do not move far out of the slot. Just get a little out of the way and combined with your body turning at a 90 degree angle, moving only 6 inches out of the way is often adequate. Just move far enough out of the way so that the follower does not run into you."

Doing the right side pass as (leader) Step-step 'hold'-step (instead of 'tap'), and letting the follower's momentum turn the leader around. This is a marvelous feeling once you get the hang of it! It makes you much more connected to the follower, and the leader gets a free ride though that move.

Specific To West Coast Swing

It is often said that the woman is doing essentially the same thing as the man in many dances, only backwards. However, this is not EXACTLY true. There are at least two kinds of symmetry involved. The first is analogous to looking into a physical mirror - like east coast swing, where the woman steps back for a rock step on her right at the same time as the man steps back on his left, just like if he was observing his image in a mirror. The second is more like a mirror in time: the follower does the second half of a symmetrical pattern, like a box or VW turn, while the leader does the first half, and then vice-versa. A common teaching tool in a beginning class is for everyone to learn the full basic together, then get followers to start doing it at a different point than leaders. The second kind isn't present in 6-count swing, which doesn't have symmetry within the basic, but it's in most of the other ballroom dances. Sometimes the two types of symmetry happen at the same time, as in Cha-cha crossover breaks.

In 2 Step, NC2S., Cha-Cha, Waltz, Foxtrot, etc., the followers and leaders (at least basically) are doing mirrored steps; so when first learning these dances you can adjust a misstep or timing error simply by observing where your partner is in relationship to you. WCS is more difficult to initially learn than most, because the leader's foot & body movement is so different from the follower's. For the most part you must KNOW the basic and can't "just follow" someone. Also because of the amount of time spent in an open position, the lady must learn to follow (and the man must learn to lead)

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more precisely than one can "get away with" in other dances.

There are many aspects about WCS to befuddle the novice dancer. In particular of the basic whip there seemed to be as many ways of doing it as there are teachers. It took me a while to figure out the logic behind each of them, and why ultimately they were all defensible. Anyone who spends any time learning WCS, will find that there are six different ways to do even the most "basic" things, and none of them are 'wrong'. If you are lucky, your teachers will advise you that what you are learning is one way to do things, but not the only way (I'm talking footwork here, not concepts like "connection"). If you are really lucky, your teachers will show you several variations on basic patterns. If you're really, really lucky, they will show you what they actually do when THEY dance. As my very first instructor pointed out - if there was anything natural about this dance, none of us would need lessons. So, there is no "natural" thing for us to do - we're going to do whatever we have been TAUGHT to do and PRACTICED doing.

WCS is unique among dances - in every other dance, frame takes precedence over everything else when it comes to lead follow - if the man leads you off the line of dance, etc., you still follow his frame. In WCS, 'SLOT' takes precedence. This is one of the essential concepts of the dance. In fact, without it, it would be virtually impossible to do your basic whip step. Some 'intermediate' followers, (but WCS

beginners) will ignore a tummy-whip (basket-whip) lead and turn their frames to face the man, even though they didn't receive a lead to do so. I thought that this was because they are used to just turning their frame to face the man on 2 in the regular whip. But it may have been that they did not know that they are supposed to follow the slot. This uniqueness is a major reason that WCS is considered an intermediate dance. The followers need to know when to follow the man's frame and when to follow the slot.

West Coast Swing is taught differently in general in California and Texas and Virginia. toes, and frequently the individual variations are even greater than the regional variations. I don't agree with everything I've heard from dance instructors. But if a teacher waffles and cannot give me a good reason for what he is teaching, my opinion of their teaching ability drops. So, pick a basic footwork and then learn the real rules of WCS: i.e.. Side Pass:

Man leads on 1 (no other lead is necessary for the Side Pass)

Be close to your partner on 2

Stay near the location of your 4 step

Don't interfere with your partner on the anchor.

Be ready to move on 1

Generally, around the country, a 4-count RHYTHM BREAK is taught as the appropriate thing to start with in closed position; usually triple, triple. If you start with two triples and then a break back on the fifth beat of dancing, it's

very simple: if you're dancing ECS, you would count this break back as 5-6 of the basic. If you're dancing WCS, you count it as 1&2, 3&4, 1-2 (of the next pattern). This makes it a 4-beat rhythm break and the walk-walk of the next pattern.

There are a group of WCS teachers who don't really even worry about what the feet are doing in the first lesson.

Most people can figure out how to walk... when you tell them they need to get from point A to point B, they take some steps. So the plan is tell them that they should each watch their partner as the follower walks past the leader (in a "left side pass.") No hands, no leads, just walking past their leaders with the both looking at each other the whole time. Get the followers started off on the right (right) foot and all of a sudden they look like more experienced dancers with decent connection. Most even get that "French cross" thing figured out without any thinking 'because it is the natural thing to do'.

The first WCS class I ever took, and I remember teacher saying that there were two basic counts for WCS - the six-beat slow, slow triple-step, anchor-step, and the eight-beat whip count, slow, slow, triple-step, slow, slow, anchor-step. I took a WCS class from Enio Cordoba a few weeks back where he was teaching whip variations, and the one he started out with was a six-

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beat whip. He said that the six-beat whip was the original pattern, and that the eight-beat whip was a variation that caught on quickly - and that, with the eight-count whip, the reason the woman inserts the slow, slow between the two triple steps (the 5 and 6 steps, in 1-2-3&4-5-6-7&8) should not be because that's what she's expecting. Rather, the man should clearly and explicitly put her weight onto her left foot on the 5, and her right on the 6, and then she does her anchor step (or preferred syncopation) once she has been let out from that. From all the other classes I've taken from him, I've gotten the general impression that the follower should assume a six-beat count, and that any variations (extensions) must be led explicitly by putting the follower on the correct foot.

Some instructors teach the 'tap-step' and some teach a 'trip-le-step' count on the 3,4 count... In the long term it is wrong to teach *either* the tap-step or tri-ple-step as "*the* thing to do" on 3,4 (or 3&4). (or 5,6 for that matter.)

The fact is, as you learn more advanced footwork variations, you'll find yourself using both of these, and other things too. e.g. another simple count that works well and looks good in many patterns (such as the standard lady's UAT) is a moving triple step on &3 4. All of these are interchangeable as far as timing goes. You can also do footwork that 'isn't' interchangeable with these, and straighten it out on the next two counts. For myself, if I'm moving, a triple step is more interesting, but if I'm standing still, a simple triple-step does look kind

of silly, and the touch-step lends itself to all kinds of simple variations, like a point, or a low kick, instead of the touch. But later you will learn variations done on the 3&4 timing that look good too, even if you aren't moving. Part of the essence of WCS is the 'flexibility' of its timing, especially with footwork. I teach pushing triple-step footwork on everything from under arm pass, sugar push etc. I always was taught before that they were interchangeable but the greater movement and body alignment you get from the foot work has more appeal. When I took a short workshop course on break endings I noticed the instructor doing a triple instead of a tap. The curious thing is that the instructor, while she said "tap" actually did a subtle triple. I don't think anyone else noticed. The other thing she said she liked was a "pump" step - a partial weight transfer - instead of a tap. She said that it made the dance look a bit more powerful. Remember that the body still needs to dance through a triple step while the feet are doing the tap step - the body smoothes it out.

Most instructors teach the tap or touch on count 3 of a Push as the norm. Many even teach it as the norm on count 3 of side passes and underarm turns. It's a real pet peeve of mine - it doesn't work with cross slot for the man, and it teaches the woman to stop their own momentum. I teach all triple steps, even on the push. I personally feel that taps should be led and not done as habit. I also think they give the dance a choppy look

when done poorly and that triple steps make beginners more graceful.

I agree with not teaching the touch step in the middle of the basic. On certain moves (basic, one-arm turn-in, tuck & reverse), the tap or touch CAN be led if the follower has learned triples on 3&4 as the norm. However, if the follower learns to tap-step on 3-4, it is IMPOSSIBLE for the leader to get them to triple on 3&4. Taps should be led. It is up to the follower to keep moving in the direction they are led until they run out of arm, run out of momentum, or the leader stops them. Furthermore, we're big on teaching a strict cross-slot (not side-switching) for the man. Ironically enough, many of the instructors here insist on teaching the tap step on side passes. I can't reconcile these two concepts. If the leader holds a strict cross-slot and the follower does a tap-step on 3-4, there is NO WAY the follower can be out of the way for the leader to step back into the slot on 4. I also point out that the triple step gives them three steps to adjust their position in response to the lead, whereas with the tap-step, they're stuck - if the leader makes a direction change on 3 and they're trying to force a tap, odds are they're going to get thrown off balance.

A 6-count pattern can be "extended" to 8 counts by the leader by adding an additional

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walk-walk at the start or by allowing an additional 2-beat rhythm break at the end. A leader can always extend a pattern. In the middle of a true 8-count, he can repeat 5-6. A follower (especially a more experienced one dancing with a less experienced leader) CAN "extend" a 6-count to 8 counts by adding the 2-beat rhythm break at the end (usually for phrasing purposes).

On extending every 6 count pattern in WCS: No, I do not think it is necessarily how the dance should go... but I do find when I am socially leading out on the dance floor I do very few actual basic 6 count patterns, maybe a few push breaks or side passes. I tend to extend a lot just because I feel like it rushes me along the dance when everything is only 6 counts. By extending the basic I allow for thinking time for me and play time for the follower. A follower loves it when a leader extends because it does give time to play... but when he says come in, she does. I think syncopations should be done within the lead, not extended by me beyond it.

Yes I do teach to extend 6 count patterns to 8 counts in SOME classes. In my "LEARN ABOUT PHRASING" class I use this method to help new dancers learn to hear the phrasing in the music by dancing every pattern 8 counts. I teach them 4 different extended basic patterns and then count them in to start at the top of the phrase. I like to do this class using basic patterns because it then opens the class up to lower level dancers. I also use this method to teach new dancers about leading and following. Even if the dancer only knows one step, lets say a push break, and the leader indiscriminately adds those two extra beats then the follower learns to wait to be led in rather than assuming that after each time she does a triple step or a 5&6 she is going to walk forward. It also stresses to the leader how important and clear his lead must be... in other words if he doesn't clearly lead back and away she will not come in.

However even though I do use these exercises I still teach 6 count basics as 6 count basics. I feel strongly that they are the foundation of a beautiful well balanced advanced dancer.

The issue, that every beginning WCS follower wants to have answered is "how do I know when to do a six or eight count pattern? The question shouldn't be asked. The job of a beginning Follower, just as an experienced Follower, is to follow. If a Follower "knows" what's up-coming and anticipates it, there's trouble if the Leader doesn't "know" what the Follower thinks.

How does the woman know to walk-walk on 5-6 of a whip step rather than triple? Followers follow more effectively when they adhere to a few simple rules and concentrate on that rather than trying to "figure out" what the pattern is.

In WCS, there is two VERY simple rules for the follower to determine whether they are doing a 6-count or proper 8-count pattern:

If there is no traveling lead during beat 4, (i.e., the man leads the definite "stay" that he should) it's definitely a 6-count. If there IS a travel lead during 4, it's PROBABLY an 8-count (there are a few exceptions).

If the man is IN the woman's slot on beat 4 (particularly his left foot), and in a proper dance position (open, closed, hammerlock, etc.), then it's PROBABLY a 6-count. If he's out of slot on 4, it's PROBABLY an 8-count.

The slot is only as wide as your shoulders. It is the man's shoulders that block the slot - not his feet. To "open the door" and let the lady down the track, you must rotate your shoulders. Leader can lead into all sorts of strange and wonderful things that Follower never did before. Good Leaders make follower do them correctly by the strength and clarity of their leads. Never should have to question upon which foot should be, should this be a triple?, etc. Leader leads. Follower follows.

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Swing Clubs

[East Meets West](#); 952-949-3016; 1st and 3rd Friday Dance at Dancesport in Hopkins 816 1/2 Main St.

Minnesota West Coast Swing; 651-731-9768; 2nd and 4th Friday Dance at B-Dale Club South of the Dale and Cty. B in St. Paul.

[TC Rebels](#) Swing club; Hotline number 952-941-0906; Dances are at Everett McClay VFW on frontage road of 494 by Mall of America.

When dancing West Coast Swing be sure to line your slot with the boards on the floor. If no boards then line up with length of room

Singles all Together has Ballroom lessons on Monday night 8 pm at the Lenox Center in St Louis Park.

Singles all Together West Coast Swing on Tuesday night 8 pm at Medina Ballroom.

TGIS dances will have free lessons 1 hour before Dance starting at 730 pm on the 1st and 3rd Saturday.

There will be 15 minutes of Beginner to get people started, Then 30 minutes of intermediate. Then 15 minute practice till dance starts.

So for all you singles that want to learn to dance while holding each other come on out.

Dance Etiquette

Line of Dance is counter clockwise around the room for dances that move, like Foxtrot, and Waltz.

People who aren't moving like Rock and roll, Rumba, or Swing Dance in the middle of the room.

If you bump into someone, say sorry.



Larry and Barb will teach you to dance..

If you step on partner, say your sorry, then forget it. (Don't rag on it.)

Finish the song you started dancing to, before excusing yourself.

Don't do a step that requires kicking, on a crowded floor.

Dance etiquette offenders

Bulldog: One who does step or kick, no matter who is in the way.

Chatter box: One who is always talking. (Social talk ok but not constantly)

Crooner: One who sings or hums with music.

Debater: One who talks politics or religion while dancing.

Iceberg: One with no smile (At least look like your having fun.)

Jolly Extrovert: One who is cheerful with surrounding people, but forgets his own partner.

Lead foot: One who can't seem to lift one's feet from the floor.

Octopus: One who holds the partner every where but the correct dance position.

Quitter: Suddenly tired 1/2 way through song. (Finish Song)

Sherman tank: The Leader leads her, but she isn't moving.

Truck driver: One who steers the partner like he drives.

Wrong way charlie: Clockwise traveler. (Against line of dance)

Larry L Ablin

Help at Singles All Together dance class on Monday nite, at Lenox center on Minnetonka Blvd in St Louis Park.

Teach at SAT West coast swing on Tuesday nite at Medina.

Teach at Jefferson Community Ed on Wednesday 26th and Hennepin

Phone: 952-891-9014 Email: lablin@earthlink.net

Larry's corner can be read at:

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