

Larry's Corner

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Can be read online at <http://www.dancempls.cutecity.com>

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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 future News letters.

If you would like to tell us how you became interested in dancing, write it down and give to Larry or Barb, we will add your picture with it and put it in one of the future Newsletters

Dance Frame

When taking a closed position hold you need to have balance and a stable frame. A good hold must allow each partner to stay balanced and not interfere with movement down the floor, a good hold must have some toned flex / give to allow adjustment inside the hold. Especially in turns it necessary for both partners to stay on their left side and not to interfere with their partner's movement. In a good hold every partner has his/her own territory. If you enter your partners territory you risk war (or at least crushed toes)!

Most dancers have gone

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through a spaghetti phase, followed by a stiff-as-a-board phase before realizing what the proper toned frame feels like. The dance frame is the foundation of your dancing - "If the foundation is weak, the house will collapse. Don't be a busy body - a quiet body allows woman to distinguish leads, and looks much better. A stable frame is important because it maximizes the amount of useful information that can be transmitted between their bodies. When the man leads, he prefaces all his steps with his momentum; for example, if he plans to step left on count 1, he puts his body weight a tiny bit leftward, a tiny fraction of a second before count 1. In this way, he tells the woman where to step next, so that she can step as much with him as possible. But if either of the partners has a soft, spaghetti-like frame, the man's momentum can't be transmitted to the woman, because there's no solid connection between their bodies for the information to travel along. Try this exercise: dancing either rumba or mambo, randomly switch between basics and cucarachas. Just before you switch, put your weight in the direction you're about to travel, almost enough to fall over. No, in real dancing you don't put so much weight into it; this is just an illustration. Can you see how your partner would feel that? That's what I'm talking about, only subtler. On the other hand, it's also bad to have too firm a frame, because then you either can't lead properly or can't react properly and you will always be throwing yourself and your partner off balance because there is no give to it, and you'll look like a mechanical robot. For example, if your firm frame extends all the way down your torso, you'll have a very difficult time stepping outside partner, because you're trying to keep not only your shoulders but also your navels parallel. Frame is defined as "the minimum tone required to achieve position and maintain it."

How are you to lead or read a lead without a good frame? When a leader moves his hand, he isn't just moving her hand, but he is moving all of her. If we don't maintain a good frame, body leads won't work either.

I found that I achieved a better sense of dance frame by practicing while holding a light card chair. It forced me to retain a dance frame, not twist, collapse, drop an arm, or shape out of alignment. It also gave me a feeling of moving in-line with a partner. I used the chair mostly for problems that I was having with Rumba and Waltz. For Swing (I don't recommend that you try open moves holding a chair in one hand, but) this technique might help with closed moves such as back-spot turns and Lindys (whips).

What we usually think of as good "styling" is really a matter of good "technique". If we follow a few simple technique rules, we will automatically look like we have good styling. The number one rule, for both leaders and followers, being: Never break your frame! That is, never let any part of your arm get behind your shoulder, whether you are in closed or open position. For example, say you are progressing down the line of

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dance and want to extend your free arm back from the line of dance as a styling gesture at some break point. We are usually taught in beginning classes to progress facing down the line of dance. So what most people end up doing is keeping their body facing forward down the line of dance and extending their hand back behind them. This however breaks the frame and doesn't look good. However, if while your feet are facing forward, you turn your upper body to the side, then you can hit the same arm pose by just extending your arm to the side. In this case your frame is not broken, it looks good, and you are facing the audience which also makes for good presentation. A good way to keep from breaking your frame was for the leader to always keep his belt buckle facing the follower and to do what ever it took in foot work to accomplish this.

I was taught at Fred Astaire that (and this may depend on the style of dance and the particular move being done) the thing to do is to always keep the navels of the leader and the follower pointing to each other where possible. In a WCS under arm pass, the leader should turn his body as the follower passes by so that his body is always facing hers.

Closed Dance Position: Followers, don't keep your left hand all the way around your partner's shoulder blade, where any backward motion on his part could throw you off-balance. Another problem with keeping your hand around the shoulder blade is that it's pretty much impossible for your partner to get you into a right turn, leading with his right hand only. Now, he needs to crank you around (break that grip you have on him) with his left hand. This makes stuff like simultaneous right turns impossible. (E.g., in WCS do a tuck turn, led only with the right hand, and both partners do a right spin out.) Plus the arm around your partner's shoulder makes it look like the lady is hanging on her partner. The follower should keep her left hand on the "front or top" side of the shoulder/upper arm joint, as it allows for a wider variety of alternatives. An even better example is when you start a whip, release the left hand on 4 normal fifth step, then on six you snake your hand up off the right shoulder so you can do an elbow catch to stop and reverse the followers spin. If the follower has the hook in you, you'd better do it real gentle like and be prepared to abort the move. When the follower first puts a hook like that on me, I might mention it in passing. If it comes back later, I'll attempt the elbow catch whip to illustrate just why it is so important not to hook. That usually fixes it for the rest of the dance because the follower realizes how easy it is to accidentally wind up with a hurt arm.

Leaders, watch where your hand is on the follow-

ers back, especially during 8-count whips. Do not put your hand low on her back, it is painful after a few swing outs. Place your hand in the center of the follower's back between the shoulder blades and maintain proper ballroom dance position. Create a form fitting dance space between you and your partner by combining hand placement, arm tension and posture. You will immediately notice a tremendous increase in momentum if you dance this way. This will provide you with the ability to do 8-count whips more efficiently to faster music. And women, don't forget to really travel out on the swing out. It is at least 50% your responsibility to get out there quickly so the next figure can be executed effortlessly."

Respond to a dance offer

By Biff me

I do have thoughts on (not to rag on gals) but the way they respond to a dance offer.

Unfortunately the world now has gone to digital, and so does the responses to dances offers. It is either a Yes or No. Problem is that the No, which is taken as NO I do not want to dance with you. But later on, I hear from gals that I did not come back and ask them again. I meant No at this time because of a reason. I did not mean No, not at all. They fail to be more analog in their answer, which would mean, No not right now because I am tired and need a rest, or did not like the song, etc. Unfortunately the gals fail to realize what they might think they are saying and what is being heard and understood is 2 different things. Myself personally will remember and not ask the gal again, because that is what I truly heard and understood it to mean. If you would like to dance with the guy, but not at that time, say so. It would go a long way to thank the person that is asking first, to put it on a positive and appreciated nature, but then decline with what your reasons are I am tired at this time, but please ask me again later. After all the guy did make the effort to come over and ask. A pleasant decline is not a turn down like what a straight No verbally projects. More than likely the gal will be remembered for her pleasant behavior and honesty and certainly be asked at a later time. To be honest is best, but also be tactful thinking in what your answer is. The idea is to have dance partners that are willing to dance with you, not to have many who do not.

Once again thank you and Barb for all you do, I appreci-

ate the article and thoughts you give, and have told others that do not live in the Twin Cities area about the site. Something they enjoy visiting.

Biff

Posture

"Maintain good dance position, good posture and... remain grounded."

As for the bent forward posture used when dancing the Lindy Hop, you can make a conscious decision to bend over, to change the look and line of the dance, to set you apart from other dancers. Note that your still thinking like a dancer and performer, aware of the lines of the body. Arthur Murray and the ballroom crew disagree with that aesthetic, and impose a straight back. That's a choice... their preference. On the posture "controversy", Fred Astaire says "Straight can be okay. Stiff is wrong." I don't teach people to bend over or straighten up--I teach people to relax. I tell them to, anyway.... You don't stoop over 'cause you're old, you straighten up 'cause you're old. I can't get over there like I used to!"



Larry Ablin enjoying another wonderful dance with Barb Johnson

Larry Ablin

After going to a charity dinner dance doing Rock and Roll, I Started taking dance lessons at Hartell's Dance World, they became Fred Astaire in 1978-1982. I received full honors Bronze trophy for learning 10 different dance Man and Lady steps with and without a partner during judging.

I have met and danced with many wonderful people in the dance world of Minnesota, California, Oklahoma, Kansas, and South Dakota.

Instructed pupils in ballroom, and West coast swing since 1978.

Helped with Singles all together dance class since 1978.

Actively participated in Showcases and Competitions. Performed in 4 showcases for Fred Astaire. Competed in Kansas City, California, Star Ball, and the Minnesota Open.

Observed students in order to determine physical and artistic qualifications and limitations.

Taught adult education in Social dancing at several Community education, such as South, Jefferson, Anderson, and Blaine.

Planned programs to meet students' needs and aspirations.

Was instrumental in starting dance lessons at TGIS dances on 1st and 3rd Saturday each month.

Explained and demonstrated techniques and methods of regulating movements of body to musical and rhythmic accompaniment.

Drilled pupils in the execution of dance steps.

Excellent track record of getting people to dance who have never danced before.

Learned all aspects of 10 different dances. Lead and follow parts

I have really enjoyed writing Larry's Corner to help people learn more about dancing, and some of the people we have in Minnesota.

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. For November we will be learning East Coast Swing. 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 Fox-trot, 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.

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

Teach at Singles All Together West coast swing on Tuesday night at Medina.

Teach Ballroom at Jefferson Community Ed on Wednesday 26th and Hennepin

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