

Larry's Corner

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

Carol and Jack are Back! Welcome back. They went to Arizona for a month, they said they had a good time, Saw Carol and Norm Fritchie and did some dancing, you were missed , nice to see both of you back on the dance floor.

Ray went to New Orleans to kick up his heels and do a little Cajun dancing, he also stopped by to say hello to Carol and Norm in Arizona, I bet they did some dancing. Welcome back Ray.

Our friend Lee Farrel from our Monday night class at SAT has been sick, Hope to see you back soon. We miss you. No one to tease downstairs.

A big thank you goes out to Bob Rascob at MEDINA Entertainment Center. He again gave us free passes for our Ballroom class on Wednesday night and also for Tuesday West Coast Swing SAT class. So the students can try out Medina and see how great it is to dance on such a wonderful floor. Thank you Bob for all the nice things you do for us. We appreciate you and your great dance floor. We saw several of the students out enjoying your Ballroom.

Susan from Brooklyn Park would like the Rebels to put who there DJ for that evening is on there hot line. That's a good idea. Ask them they do have an email address.

Larry Becklund and Vicky Kneeland from Tuesday WCS are engaged to be married in April.

Scott and Sherry from the Monday night class at SAT are engaged to be married in April.

Allen from our West Coast Swing SAT dance class announced that he's engaged to a wonderful lady named Judy. She's in our Monday night dance class.

Congratulation to all 3 couples. And guess what? They met at the TGIS dances.



On Arm Tone

Arm tension is possibly the most important aspect to good dancing. Sometimes very firm arm tension is required, and other times, spaghetti-like arm tension is needed. Followers and leaders, over time, should develop a good sense of when to have strong-arm tension and when to be loose. It is especially important in West Coast Swing to use different levels of arm tension depending on the figure. In general, firm arm tension is desired.

Followers: In general, the side to side motion of your arms should be connected to your body, while the vertical movement is free. That way movement in the horizontal plane causes the follower to move or turn, while the vertical movement is free for underarm turns, etc. You should not have spaghetti-like arms in the horizontal plane, or provide resistance in the vertical direction (other than in say, a death-drop). Keeping one's arm loose to move up and down but firm in a direction in which moving it would turn your body is very difficult to learn. Women who are learning alternate between keeping the arm too loose in all direc-

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tions and too stiff in all directions, not realizing that they need a combination of both at the same time.

Trying to find the ideal balance between tone and relaxation. It is Not an easy concept to integrate, even after one is consciously aware. Something I think is helpful to get the proper feel in your arms is to face a wall from a distance an inch or so farther than your extended arms' fingertips. Fall toward the wall and PUSH yourself back to erect. If you don't catch yourself soon enough or with enough tone, your nose will let you know. If you push too hard, your feet will let you know. If your arms are too stiff, your shoulders and/or neck will let you know.

Another general rule of thumb on tone: When dancing, try to maintain the same level of communication between your hands and your partners' hands. That is, whenever possible, maintain an equal amount of pressure against or with each other. This makes both dancers extremely sensitive to one another since any slight deviation in pressure is a clear indication of what lead is being given. There is a marvelous subtlety in leading and following that can be experienced if both dancers eliminate dead space in the communication that exists between the hands and body.

Don't let the movement of your lower body interfere with the non-movement of the upper body. That is, do not create noise in your arms when you move your hips or kick with your feet. Maintain proper arm tension... Don't be a "busy body" - a quiet body allows a woman to distinguish leads, and looks much better.



Your arms are an extension of your body, not a separate entity. Thus, your body should be responsive to anything that is done to your arms. If you have spaghetti-like arms, you will not be responsive since you will miss indications from the leader. You will miss these indications because they will be absorbed by your arms instead of sensed by your arms. If you press your finger into Jell-O, it will just get absorbed, but if you press your finger against a rock, the rock will move. Do not separate your arms and body (except in a few advanced figures).

Close your eyes sometimes when dancing to really try to understand that much of this dance is done with communication in the body and arms (recall the tension tip earlier on arms and body not being separate entities). Dance an entire song with your eyes closed and just try to listen to one another through your arms and body. Don't do complicated figures, of course, but play around with different types of tension and listen to one another through your arms.

Typically, the word "tone" is used since the arms should not be tense, i.e. where extending and retracting muscles are both "on". Instead, the arm should act like a spring with a matching opposing force either pushing or pulling. Sometimes you have to react to a lead by simply moving, other times (boogie walk or jive walk in East Coast swing) giving the exact amount of counter resistance. This connection is a harder thing to quantify than

textbook technique.

In order to overcome spaghetti arms many teachers use the word resistance. Resistance, while getting the immediate result, creates a whole new set of problems. Any top teacher knows that arm resistance is wrong. Instead of locking the biceps and forearm muscles to create resistance, a good teacher teaches to isolate the upper pectoral muscle, which locks the entire arm in place eliminating the spaghetti arm yet making for an easily leadable follower. Should be using Action/Reaction that while partially explaining lead and follow is more suitable than resistance.

While many teachers teach beginners to lock the biceps & forearm muscles and pull, we teach that you lock the upper pectoral & shoulder muscles while keeping the arm and forearm relaxed, pliable and responsive (toned).

In my experience, the stiffness or heaviness in a follower's arm is often an unconscious protective response to leads that are too strong and/or dangerous (or leads that are perceived as such). For example some followers really dislike being led in a barrel roll on a crowded dance floor, because they fear crashing into their partner or being sent crashing into other dancers. You have to 'train' your followers to trust you.

(I love this description) Personally, I like a good **s t r o n g** "breathing" connection for W.C. Swing. Like you say, this does 'not' mean rigid, but there should defi-



nately be some sensuous push and pull to it.

The woman's arm should be in a comfortable position, neither overly extended, or stiff, nor overly bent, or too relaxed. If her arm is fully extended, it's neither natural nor comfortable, it's difficult to absorb shocks, it's tiring, and it looks silly. It's much better to have a slightly bent and relaxed arm position, not quite fully extended. The man's arm position is similar. Both have to have tone (if the body moves, the arm moves with it.) Some say the default level for hands is the woman's center of gravity. Where is that? Two inches below her navel.

You should use "short arms" in swing (and jive). "Short arms" means never extend fully, always keep them bent. The angle varies as you dance. "Short arms" look better and give you and your partner better control for leading and following. The idea is not to be rigid; you want to convey strength AND flexibil-

T_{HANK} G_{OD} I_M S_{INGLE} DANCE LESSON

Where:

Thank God I'm Single dances
Call the hotline 763-503-5444 for location
or <http://www.tgisdances.com> web page

When:

**Free dance lesson with paid admission Every
saturday 1 hour Before Dance usually 730 pm
starting in May**

- 1st and 3rd Saturday will be East Coast Swing
- 2nd and 4th Saturday will be Nightclub 2 step
- If there are more than 4 Saturdays in a month we will teach other dances

ity – certain springiness. There is body weight involved, and a good, simple exercise is for partners to face each other. Elbows bent about 90 degrees, hands more or less at waist level, and connect with a pistol grip: lady's hands are palms down, wrists lowered, fingers hooked over guy's; guy's palms face each other, fingers bent inwards so lady can hook hers over the top. No grabbing! The hands are loosely hooked, that's all. Now lean into each other, then away from each other, feeling each other's body weight. The trick is to match each other's use of body weight to maintain your balance as a couple. That's the kind of connection you want to feel in swing. When you get used to it, it feels VERY good, and you and your partner can be most responsive to each other using this technique. It applies to most if not all rhythm and Latin dancing as well, and can be used with other types of connections such as "patty-cake" and "sugar-push" handholds. This advice applies to both partners. If leaders can use their posture, dance frame and body weight effectively, they'll never have to "strong-arm" a woman to get her to follow. The quickest way to learn this is to practice it with a pro and get corrective feedback.

Watch out for "chipmunk arms" - elbows down, paws up in front of the chest, as well for as "chicken wings" - elbows bent and sticking out far behind your back.

The lady should generally match the leader's arm extension. When you

shake hands with someone, where do you put your hand? In their face, or chest? No, you extend it midway between you both. The same for dancing. In WCS, the angle between the man's upper arm and forearm changes from 90 through 135 degrees. For the woman, this is 90 to almost 180 (straight) - never lock elbows (or knees) when dancing. One of the reasons is that you cannot maintain connection if you lock your elbow.

Both short arms (bent at the elbow) and long arms (extended but not locked, with shoulders down) are appropriate at various times in West Coast Swing, as long as:

1. A good, centered body line in both partners results, and
2. It matches a lead/follow resulting from movements of the dance.

This usually means (for me) short arms for the usual "basic" patterns. Also anytime the woman is turning, or moving by me in the slot. "Long arms" in an extended line, sometimes with the man well into the right knee, left leg pointed straight out to the side, woman in a sit break, or some other leg line (a "show off" pattern of some sort)

The follower should match the arm extension of the leader. On a crowded dance floor, the leader might keep his arm in close. If the follower does not match and keep her arm in close, the leader may not be able to keep his partner from crashing into someone else. Also, when the music is fast, the arms usually extend less to reduce the movement.

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

Medina Ballroom is having Country dance
night every Thursday from 7-1030 pm Live
Band

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.

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.

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.

TGIS dances will have free lessons

1 hour before Dance starting at 730 pm
on the 1st and 3rd Saturday. 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.

Larry L Ablin

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

Teach at Singles All Together West coast swing
on Tuesday night 8pm at Medina.

Teach Ballroom at Jefferson Community Ed on
Wednesday at 26th and Hennepin 612-668-
2740 Next class starts 4/16/2003 630-830 6
weeks

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

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 posi-
tion.

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)