

Larry's Corner

Volume 3, Issue 9

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September 2003

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Do you have any likes or dislikes, stories, 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



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The "j-lead"

In WCS the leader and follower share the slot, whereas in Push/Whip the leader moves across the slot. This is most clear in the basic closed whip, where Push/Whip has the leader stepping to the side. In Whip/Push, with the frequent use of double resistance, the partners are pushing off of each other on the last beat of the break ending. This creates a tension (connection) on 1, even with a closer dance distance than WCS.

If there is full connection, then if the leader steps to the side on 1 (a), the connection now becomes the hypotenuse of the right triangle (c). If the length of the connection remains the same, then the distance between the partners (b) has to shorten.

This is what allows Whip/Push dancers to produce a body lead rather than an arm lead using the cross slot concept.

It is why Whip/Push "works" with a side step rather than always a back step. One thing you will find about traditional Whip/Push is that it is VERY conservative of the man's motions, especially the arm motions. Nothing is extra. The man basically only moves his arm as much as is necessary to produce the lead - no more. She's the picture, he's the frame. Show off the woman. Don't distract with unnecessary motions of the man's arm.

As the partners pull in to each other, the arms naturally compress. If the follower keeps tone in her right arm, then it will run into the man (so to speak) on count 2, causing her to turn and yet still travel (the result of a light off-center lead).

One of the great universal truths I have learned about slotted swing dancing is that there is a way to lead turns that is universally consistent and always produces a good lead. If you lead the woman straight down the slot (forwards or backwards) and then stop one side of her body,

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you produce the most effective lead with the least amount of motion. If you want the woman to turn in place, you lead the turn with exactly the same strength as the down-the-line lead. If you want her to travel, you simply under lead the turn. She turns, but since you have not completely stopped her momentum, she continues to travel. Any sideways motion is confusing, and Any sideways lead, based on the laws of physics, clearly causes a balance problem for the woman, as it is pushing her out of the slot.

So in the case of the whip, the most efficient lead is to simply stop the woman's right arm gently, allowing her body to continue traveling. While she is passing, the arm will stay in place. Once she passes and starts to extend, the arm will naturally extend.

I demonstrate this concept by having a woman walk past me with a horizontally extended, toned forearm, and her eyes closed. I let her take a few steps and just when she commits her weight to her right foot, I stick my arm out and stop her hand. Voila', she turns and steps backwards. No



"J" required. Works for the backwrap to a free spin, except she's stepping to her left on two. Same concept. Some teachers teach a "J" lead (man's left arm describes a "J" as viewed from above) on 1 of a WCS Whip. I would consider a "J-lead" excessive arm motion. I have been taught the "J" lead in both ECS and WCS. I believe it can help in ECS when leading an open to closed position basic, but I cringe whenever I am in a workshop where it is taught in WCS. I too consider a "J-lead" to be unnecessary, busy, and think it only interferes with proper connection. The J-lead is confusing because it actually produces a brief arm lead back down the slot. Yuck.

When the man starts the J lead early with a contra body prep on 1 the J lead turns into a

huge circle. This preps the woman to her left on 1, where 1 should be reserved for starting the woman forward into the slot. If you do this to a responsive follower, she will think you are leading her into a sideways step.

When you see the "J" lead one thing you can figure is that there is not much leading and following going on. When the man breaks side and the woman goes forward either he is really good and leading contra body motion (highly unlikely unless he has a lot of experience) or she is running on auto pilot - i.e. if the man does not get out of the way he will be run down. The "J" lead really destroys the come together go apart character of WCS, which then winds up looking like a backward Carolina shag.

Leading in dancing is like driving a vehicle. Depending on how heavy it is, how fast it

accelerates, and how sharply it can turn, you must adjust your driving. If you want that eighteen wheeler to turn left safely, you had better start out one lane to the right, and have that J-LEAD handy on the steering wheel.

So, think about how, when, and whether you apply the J-lead. If the answer does not depend on who your

partner is, you are probably not leading very well. A J-lead is an extension of the general concept of 'wind-up'. You need different amounts of wind-up depending upon the maneuver you are performing, and with whom you are performing it.

When teaching, it's better to address the problem than to put a band-aid over it. If the problem is a lack of tone in the follower's arm on the change of connection from pull to push, then teachers shouldn't teach a J lead in the whip to get around it, unless they are teaching a course on real-social-dance-world survival skills. In reality, I probably, without realizing it, use the J-lead dancing socially when I have to. The question is what are you going to teach beginners and what is likely to be most

effective with them. I don't want to teach guys to have to compensate for noodle-arm followers - I want to fix the followers.

The leader gives the follower enough lead to move her to the other end of the slot on 1. Then, stopping the woman's right hand gives her a good lead to turn around because you turn part of her forward momentum into turning momentum. The common mistake is that the woman goes noodle-armed and lets her arm go behind her. If she stays toned, as soon as her arm is compressed, she will turn. The man stops her hand at his waist, very close in, not way out in front of him. This gives her plenty of room to move, and she doesn't have to step out of the slot. (When dancing to fast music or in a short slot, stop the hand farther out in front of the man. This stops her momentum and turns her sooner.)

Some say that the J lead keeps her hand in the same relation to her body throughout the 2, and it lets her turn in place rather than making her go out of the slot to get around her hand. But in WCS, you DON'T want to see her hand in the same relation to her body throughout the move - that starts looking too much like a ballroom frame. The natural expansion and contraction of the arms is part of the contrast that is much of the beauty of WCS.

If you ask the good followers, many of them say that they prefer a visual lead! To do a simple half turn on one beat of music does not require a lot of leading. If she's a good dancer, she will just keep her frame pointing at you. This is part of what enables you to do a one-hand whip.

It is also very important to have your right hand on her shoulder blade by the end of 2 so that you can control how far you want her to go out on 3. So, I'll throw caution to the winds and suggest that you only need to lead enough turn

to get your right hand on her shoulder blade without running the danger of getting speed bumps. Of course, you are still connected with the other hand.

So, if she's a good dancer, she will just keep her frame pointing at you. If she has proper momentum, simply stopping her hand is enough. If she's taking baby-steps, has no arm tone, etc., you may need the J-lead. Big, exaggerated, loopy, round house, 2-handed, circle J leads are sometimes just the ticket in some situations. I wouldn't call them elegant or efficient. But sometimes that's what it takes to make things work, throw in some variety, not crash into other couples and have some fun. It's also good to have an idea of what to do (and not do) when one finds oneself dancing with a partner who's much better than oneself.



I've always wondered how much a teacher should teach about how to dance really well with perfect partners and how much about how to survive and have fun while dancing socially in the real world with partners who have

all sorts of problems. My dancing these days is pure social dancing, where I dance with different partners, some whom I've never met before. Some of these ladies are tanks, can't keep time, have no tone, etc. One well-known dance instructor said grin, and bear it and say "thank you very much" and then not dance with them again.

However, Murphy's Law says that the klutzy beginner to whom you show a cold shoulder this week will become a great dancer next year. So I'd say it's good to know how to compensate for various common partner problems. That way you can make the 3 minutes as pleasant as possible. And then when those partners gets really good, maybe they'll remember you as someone they had fun dancing with.

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 Twin City Ballroom

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.

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 Niteclub 2 Step on Tuesday night 8pm at Medina.

Teach Ballroom at Jefferson Community Ed on Wednesday at 26th and Hennepin 612-668-2740 Next class starts 10/9/2003 630-830 8 weeks

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

Web <http://www.dancempls.com>

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.

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)