

# Larry's Corner

Volume 4, Issue 05

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May 2004

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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.

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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

## How To Remember Dance Material

This real life drama happened about a year ago. Like many leaders, I have trouble maintaining our repertoire of dance material and patterns. Literally, I have trouble remembering what I remember. The number of patterns I know far exceeds the number that I can recall and execute on any give dance night. What's wrong with me? Is it brain damage?

Get out a legal pad and draw a six column grid. Label the columns 1) push, 2) pass, 3) underarm, 4) whip, 5) extended and matching patterns and 6) footwork patterns. Start writing.

### MECHANICS OF RECALL

To get something newly learned from your short term memory into long term memory takes a lot of review and practice after the lesson. According to Buzan, to ensure retention we should review material in the following sequence for optimum results. Review new material 1) ten minutes after the learning session, 2) twenty-four hours after the learning session, 3) one week after the learning session, 4) one month after the learning session, 5) six months after the learning session, and 6) as needed after that. This may be enough review for a new word, or a new concept, but I believe even more review is necessary for dance material.

New learning which is not reinforced (practiced) declines so that only about 10 percent will be retained after two days. This means, as far as dance is con-

cerned, that we will have virtually zero retention in two days if we don't practice within the first twenty-four hours.

### MNEMONICS

According to memory experts, people think in images. It is much easier to remember a picture of a flower than it is to remember the word flower. So it is easier to remember a dance patterned named "the rose," than it is to remember one named "the reverse whip with double spin ending."

Imagine, for example, that you just learned the following pattern. Straight whip with three continuous close position turns. Looks like a little tornado on the dance floor. Call it the "tornado" and you'll never forget it.

If your instructor does not give patterns a name, or if she or he uses technical names change them. Give every new pattern name that you can picture in your mind. Use names like the pretzel, the bull whip, the race car, the splash, the run-in, the school bus. Any thing that you can see as a picture that relates to the move you are doing. It doesn't have to be an exact lookalike. The mnemonic is only used to spark your memory. A move named "the swan" need not have you diving to the floor. It might be some very subtle motion of the arm that reminds you of a swan.

### CLUSTERING

In adults, all new memory is attached to existing memory. You can see this in everyday conversation. Someone says, "I have a gray cat." You think, I used to have a tabby cat. "My gray cat has kittens." You think when I was a kid my tabby cat had eight kittens. And so it goes, all new memory links and connects, and relates to existing memory. The more memories and experiences we have to relate with the more new ones we can absorb. In this sense, the more we learn, the more we can learn.

Try this method for learning dance material. Cluster similar things together. Learn Three new endings to an old pattern. Discover five new ways to do a side-pass. Think of one body wrap and invent or borrow three similar moves to go with it. Every time you practice one, practice all the moves in the cluster.

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## LINKING

Dance competitors choreograph their material to a song. Every move is planned, every beat is filled. Three plus minutes of "linked" material. The partners practice together until the new material becomes second nature. When that song plays, pow their memories go to work.

Many styles of martial art use forms or choreographed patterns to help students learn technique. These linked patterns go together in a natural flow. At each level of development the student is asked to memorize and practice new and increasingly difficult patterns. After some time the martial arts student know dozens of fighting techniques. To recall them, he or she need only practice the forms.

Even if you don't compete, you can work with your regular partners to link material together. Combine a little bit of old stuff with a lot of new material to build a routine. Then, keep practicing over time. This material will be preserved in your memory forever. You can create several routines like this, each one containing over three minutes worth of new and different material. If you put together three routines filling three songs using only six count moves you would have approximately 160 patterns in your head!

## NOTING

On a simpler scale, by simply writing down a description of each new pattern you can create a notebook full of memory aids.

Even better, if you have access to a video camera, set it up on a tripod. With a partner do each new pattern very slowly and from different angles. Be sure to record your name for the pattern and any clues to help you remember better when you refer to the tape later on.

## TEACHING

There is no better way to learn a thing than to teach it to others. If you can't find a friend willing to let you teach them your new material, set up an imaginary situation. Pretend that you are teaching someone else. Verbalize and demonstrate every detail of the pattern. This act of teaching will help seat the material into your long term memory. Furthermore, by teaching it, you will identify areas of uncertainty. You will find yourself returning to your instructor for clarification.

Teaching others is perhaps the most powerful of all the memory enhancement skills. Try to teach new material to someone else within the first twenty four hours of learning it.

## FOLLOW THE LEADER

The popular conception is that followers are not responsible for remembering material. I've heard female dance students complain that pattern lessons are of no use to them. They say they cannot practice because they can't lead and the leaders don't remember the material very long after the lesson. This is a reasonable observation.

I believe, however, that followers can be very active in the memory process. By using the techniques described above, followers can cue their leader's memory. If, for example, a follower remembers the name of the pattern, what the pattern's "cluster group" is, links the new pattern to another similar pattern in her mind and takes notes on how she follows it, she can use any number of suggestions to help her partner remember. Followers find it easier to remember patterns when they are linked together to form routines. It takes two people to recall a routine.

## VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

Just knowing and leading lots of patterns does not make us good dancers. We need proper technique and cool styling to be really great. Patterns alone are nothing without skill. However, most of us enjoy variety. Some of us are pattern "junkies," who just love the challenge of complexity. Patterns do add something to the experience. I believe that if we go to the trouble of learning them, we might as well remember them.

Larry L Ablin and Barb Johnson

Teach Beginners at Singles All Together dance class on Monday night, at Lenox center on Minnetonka Blvd in St Louis Park.

Teach at Singles All Together on Tuesday night 8pm at Medina. Starting Country 2 step 4/27/2004

Teach Ballroom at Jefferson Community Ed on Thursday at 26th and Hennepin 612-668-2740

Lakeville Class Century Junior High 952-985-4610

Prior lake class Grainwood Elementary 952-440-2930

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