

Larry's Corner

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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

Pre-leads And Prep-leads

A pre-lead is a small lead in the direction you want her to turn. The follower's momentum is going in the same direction in both the pre lead and during the turn. This gives a smooth look and feel. A 2-step example is the Lady's Outside Turn from standard closed position where the follower is turned slightly in the counter clockwise direction on the 2nd slow before doing the clockwise turn on quick-quick. The lead is initiated by the leader going into a contra-body position and is similar to the lead for going into promenade. This type of lead is used a lot in ballroom.

A prep-lead is a small lead in the opposite direction of the turn that you will lead. They involve a wind-up immediately prior to a figure, turn, or pattern. A prep is a "tuck" type feeling that keeps the frame closed and uses the compression of the tuck to signal the turn. It's got a snappy look. It starts the follower's momentum going in one direction, stops it, and then starts it in the other direction. A 2-step example is the Lady's Outside Turn from standard closed position where the follower is turned slightly in the clockwise direction on the 2nd slow before doing the clockwise turn on quick-quick.

The result is the prep-lead is VERY visible to observers while the pre-lead is almost invisible. There are the equivalents of preps or pre-leads in smooth dances like waltz and foxtrot. They're usually very subtle and hidden in things like "CBM" and "change of sway". In a lot of partner dances and dance pattern amalgamations, this prep or wind-up seems to be an integral of the previous step. It's a form of communication telling the lady to be set on her standing leg and snug in the man's frame for the start of a turning figure.

You seldom see ballroom dancers using a closed-frame prep in a waltz or foxtrot. This is part of the smooth character of these dances. If you watch the CW folks you see closed-frame preps all over the place in 2step and even waltz.

Rhythm dances like swing or Latin usually use two beats to execute a tuck-turn prep. The compression part of a tuck turn is an integral part of these dances. The compression stores energy that can be released for speed. (If I push real HARD, I can go real FAST :)

Most experts classify CW2S as a 'smooth' dance. Others classify it as a traveling swing dance. (Single rhythm swing.) Preps in CW2S are OK, but they aren't necessary. I try to do without them, especially when I'm social dancing. Personally, I'd never do a prep into an outside turn in 2-step because I wouldn't lead a ladies outside turn from a basic. I would lead it from a closed turn or something else; it flows better that way. Preps are sharp and powerful for competition dancing, but too many of them make you look jerky. Since much of the change in CW dancing in the last decade came from the competitors, preps have become a standard part of CW dancing. (Not all of the changes to CW dancing are beneficial.)

In 2-step, the turns are usually never going to be faster than one turn per quick-quick. Exceptions are choreographed and not used socially by most dancers. So there is no need for a tuck to give her something to bounce off for a double turn. Also, 2-step should generally flow and not have severe directional changes except maybe to hit accents in the music. If you start her turning, you let her turn.

After doing a few basics I think there is a tendency to start to relax and enjoy the ride only to miss the cue to start doing stuff again, especially if that cue is dependent on a very good frame. Preps in CW2S are also a way of getting the follower's attention by using compression so that the tension part of the lead will be followed. Beginners may not follow the prep and since the 'expert' always has a good frame, the prep isn't necessary. Overall, I believe that beginners and expert followers would prefer pre-leads in CW2S. They are unambiguous to the beginners and expert followers don't need preps to execute smooth turns. But many followers become trained to expect preps; and many leaders are trained to execute preps. That doesn't make it right. If you took an expert smooth-dance follower out for a

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CW2S and executed a closed frame tuck, the result might be comical.

In open-frame two step, I use preps to begin doubles & triples & that sort of thing, and this might not be correct but it looks and FEELS good. (It is usually a two-count prep at the BEGINNING of the last slow, that places her foot and center where I want it.)

Leading Multiple Turns

How do you tell if a woman likes to spin? If she can do them well, she does. Try her out with just one at first. If she does it with good control, try her with two, and if that seems nice, she definitely likes spinning, although not to the exclusion of the other aspects of the dance (such as syncopating!) Also, don't spin the heck out of her on a crowded floor.

Do not force a follower to turn several times if she is not an adequate turner. It will lead to stirring or cranking of the arm or loss of balance."

Double (and more) turns for the follower should be led. If the leader leads a single spin and the lady leads herself into a second spin, the lead will be a hindrance, not a help, and the result is usually less than graceful. Leading with small circles over the head makes it clear when the leader asks for a double (or more) while connected. For the second, and each additional spin, the lead is quite subtle, just a sort of twitch of the contact hand, but readily understood. To practice the "twitch", find a phonograph turntable, position your wrist above the spindle, put your fingertips on the table and spin the table, keeping your fingers in the same spot as the table goes around. That approximates the wrist action. First get good at it with either hand, in either direction, then work on the timing.

Though some teachers say, "With an advanced partner, you DON'T lead the spins, just put your hand up there, centered above her head.", this really just indicates to the follower that you want her to go under, not to spin. If you don't do anything with the raised hand to let her know what you want, the spin needs to be led with your other hand.

Leading spins using the philosophy that a follower set in motion stays in motion until stopped is good for free spins.

Lead the first, of course, and then she's on her own. The leader should wait, catch-hand at the ready. The follower should keep her right hand in a place where the leader can catch it and she should keep spinning until he does. If you lead a follower into a free spin, she can spin however many times she wants and you look great 'cause you led it.

When led into a free spin your follower may do a triple or more but not necessarily in two beats - she may

take enough beats to finish a phrase. Leaders - don't just stand there and watch - count, and make sure you lead when she's done. Using a combination of the two methods you can do anything.

The man should lead every spin if he has connection with the lady (unless it is a free spin - no hands). When leading, he MUST lead on time. If he puts her in a free spin, she MUST end on time. Of course, some leaders are not yet adept at leading a lady on time without throwing her off balance - in which case it might be better for him not to try to lead her spins until he can get more lessons! **One follower wrote: I will spin the number of times the man leads. I find it disturbing if a leader simply holds his hand up as I am unsure what he wants, especially if he is a beginner and tends to rush his next lead. Another writes: I prefer when a leader leads the turns AS LONG AS he does not pull me off balance or off tempo in the process. Since I know what the timing of my turns must be in order to stay in time with the music, I find that many times the guys that lead me through turns tend to rush me, or to slow me down, both of which adversely affect the feel of the dance for me. **Yet another writes: The lady must be able to maintain tone in her arm and control her spins enough to keep up with the man. If not, the man would (hopefully) refrain from forcing her to do multiple spins. I prefer to follow a man who will gently lead my spins to control timing and direction of travel (if any).

**Yet another writes: Guys who just hold their hands over your head as a "lead" to spin are not fun to dance with. In fact, this tells me immediately that he is not a well-trained dancer. Every spin should be clearly led. Some guys don't know how to make it clear whether he's leading one or two spins. If the follower is a good spinner, it's especially important to make a very obvious difference between one and two spins. If she's good, and you led two spins but she did one, that means your lead was not clear (although sometimes if I think the guy is gonna yank my arm hard behind my back while I'm spinning, I'll abort two spins and just do one regardless of what I know he led, in self protection.) The best guys can even lead multiple free spins to some extent, i.e., their lead says "do one," "do two," or "spin like mad for as long as you can!" I've also, however, seen a few women, who like to show themselves off, spin for 10 or 15 extra beats when led for a simple free spin, traveling away from the guy (in swing) and making him run after them though this can be rude to the poor guy. One thing guys can do is watch a woman spin with guys who are known to be good dancers, and see how she does. If she does as well (or better?) with you, you're on the right track! If you can lead a follower who's been doing single turns all night to do a double, you get a gold star.

There is no question but that a good dancer leads spins (more than just raising his hand) and also the number. Very beginning leaders are sometimes taught simply to raise their hand (straight up for an arch turn, or up and across for a loop turn), and this can be adequate for a single turn if the tone in the arm is good. It's not a bad way to start out, since it can be too much for rank beginners to appreciate and feel the subtleties of pressure and timing--at least this increases the likelihood that the leaders will raise their arms when they're supposed to. The lead for multiple spins: We need

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to distinguish between at least two cases (for simplicity, let's just talk about single vs. double spins—the concepts can be generalized for more than 2 spins):

1. Double spins using extra counts of music (nominally two extra)-- let's call it a "slow double," or
2. Double spins without using extra counts of music (nominally two total)--let's call it a "fast double."

Case (1) is easier, of course, but not unobvious. There is a certain constant pressure that constitutes the "tone" that is maintained as the woman is doing her turn--this creates the "halo" effect that people referred to. On a single spin, there is a releasing of that tone followed by a lowering of the arm as the woman is completing the turn. For a slow double, the arm is kept raised, of course, but the tone is not released as much. I find that it is lessened a little toward the end of the first spin, and then increased in a little pulse for the second (I guess you could call that a twitch). Part of the reason for this pulse is that is when the woman would be slowing down to stop the turn, if it were a single, and the extra pressure at this point provides a more definite indication that she is to continue turning.

The subtlety is that the timing is actually a little bit more relaxed for a slow double than for a single. This is because one wants the spins to appear continuous--if the woman turns too quickly (possibly because the man rushed it) the second turn either comes ahead of the music, or there is an awkward stop and start effect as if the second spin were an afterthought.

Case (2) (fast double) has subtleties that are quite different! Here are the two main differences:

(a) A difference in timing. If the two types of spins are nominally taking up the same number of musical counts, the double starts a split-beat earlier. This dances better, since both need to fill out the music so there are no "dead" times, and is also related to ...

(b) A difference in pressure. This should be explained carefully-- I do not mean that the man turns the woman around harder! It's more like the acceleration is higher, i.e., I get from "normal contact tone" to "spin tone" more quickly for a double. It is this more rapid transition that conveys the speed (and hence number) of the turn(s). Whether the pressure is actually more for a fast double depends a lot on the woman--some feel the difference in the timing and do the fast double with no additional pressure while others seem to do better with a slightly firmer pressure through the double. But I do believe that it is the "impulse" of the faster transition and its timing that is the primary lead for a good follower.

If you increase the number of turns you'll have to steal time from the motion before and after. One of the most common double turns in WCS is out of a tuck turn. If you stop the follower completely in the tuck, you won't get further than a double turn. But if you bounce her immediately into the turn, than you can do a triple turn (in two beats). But you need to start plenty quick, and be prepared to finish the turn into the next pattern. The

follower needs to be somewhat advanced for this and be stepping 1 2&3 4 5&6 in order to get this to work. You're not going to be able to get her into a tuck early unless she does (maybe you can start the turn on the & after the tuck when the tuck is on 3 but I'm under the impression that this might throw off her rhythm causing her to step one too many times.)

When I'm dancing with a woman for the first time, I'll start out with a single, and then 1-1/2 spins (e.g., exit from sweetheart or wrap position), and by then I'm pretty well calibrated for the amount of pressure she needs to do doubles and more, and whether she can maintain her balance through multiple spins.

Lest we lose ourselves in all this analysis, let me also add that I have never seen this explained by any teacher in a class, nor have I perceived a strong need for this type of explanation in most teaching. It seems that as a dancer (leader or follower) gets more accomplished, a lot of this comes naturally as one develops an instinct for it.

How does a lady communicate that she enjoys multiple spins (triples and far beyond) to a partner that doesn't know her well?

Exercising the option during free spins, seems to work. Note, though, that a beginning leader may get confused by the need to "mark time" or adjust the footwork if the woman is using extra counts of music for multiple free spins.

Other than free spins, I don't know that it can be done comfortably at the sole discretion of the follower--it would seem that there are too many subtle differences in the timing and pressure of the lead.

If I lead a double spin and a woman does a single, I don't lead it again for the rest of the dance (although she generally knows that something else was expected the first time since the arm is lowered late). If I lead a single and the woman does or tries to do a double (with some awkwardness the first time if I don't catch that fast enough), I (a) lead more doubles since I figure she likes them and (b) adjust the timing to be even more relaxed when I really want her to do a single.

The problem I see with the woman trying to decide a priority to do a fast double (other than during free spins) is that even if she can abort the second one (e.g., if the man lowers his arm too soon for her to do it), there is now dead time in the music because the turn was too fast for a true single. It also means that she has lost communication with the man during the turn--with good followers, I always have a sense that I can modify, abort, syncopate or otherwise change the spin while it is happening, and she will follow it (assuming it's physically possible, of course).

Most of the above discussion is written as it would apply to an arch (clockwise) turn, since it's easier to talk about (and execute) the positive pressure generated by the lead for this turn than about the negative ("pull") pressure for a loop (counter-clockwise) turn, but analogous comments could be made for loop turns too.

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One of the secrets of leading three or more consecutive turns is to adjust the speed of the lead to the speed with which the follower turns. If you do this properly, you may be able to lead many more turns than the follower could ever manage before and she may then be amazed at her own ability to turn so much. This requires giving up all attempt at keeping with the music until the multiple turns are completed, then synchronizing. Or, if you are imaginative and rhythmic, you can slow down the turns a bit and pace the music at some ratio, such as 2:3 or 3:4.

When doing multiple spins, there are a few tricks for maintaining balance - you can do a certain kind of head flick at the end of the last spin to help eliminate dizziness, and that the man can lead a few subsequent spins in the opposite direction to help too. This certain kind of head flick at the end of the last spin consisted of dipping the head down and around and up, with the "around" part done in the opposite sense of the multiple spin direction. It was hard to see because it happens so quickly, (and all her hair flying around makes it look really neat and much more of a motion than it actually is). The goal of the flick is to stop the fluid flow in the semi-circular canals in the inner ear so you don't have a dizzy feeling. Another technique that seems to work is borrowed from ice skaters. Immediately after completing the multiple spins, the spinner comes down hard on the heel of the lead foot on the first step of the anchor. This tends to stop the fluid in the inner ear from sloshing around (the cause of the dizziness). A

little practice is required to do this smoothly, but, it works.

If the lady is a competition dancer, she should turn herself as long as you have your hand directly over her head.

When you're done spinning her, drop her hand down just at the point she needs to be coming out of the turn. In competition ballroom, it's generally not appropriate to exert "unnecessary" force against your partner since you can throw her balance off. If she's a competition dancer, she'll know what your leads mean without being "forced" through the step.

In social ballroom, it's a different issue. The assumption here is that your partner isn't practicing many hours a week, as competition dancers do, so a little more direction through the motion and step may be necessary and desirable.

In general, you need to adjust your leading to fit your partner's ability. Lead only enough to successfully direct your partner through the move. The lead should not go beyond offering direction to your partner; the lead should never encumber your partner.

My motto is: dance and let your partner dance too. Don't push or require that you be pushed. If a lady does not coordinate her own movement, balance and does not provide the power to travel then she makes it hard for her partner.

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