

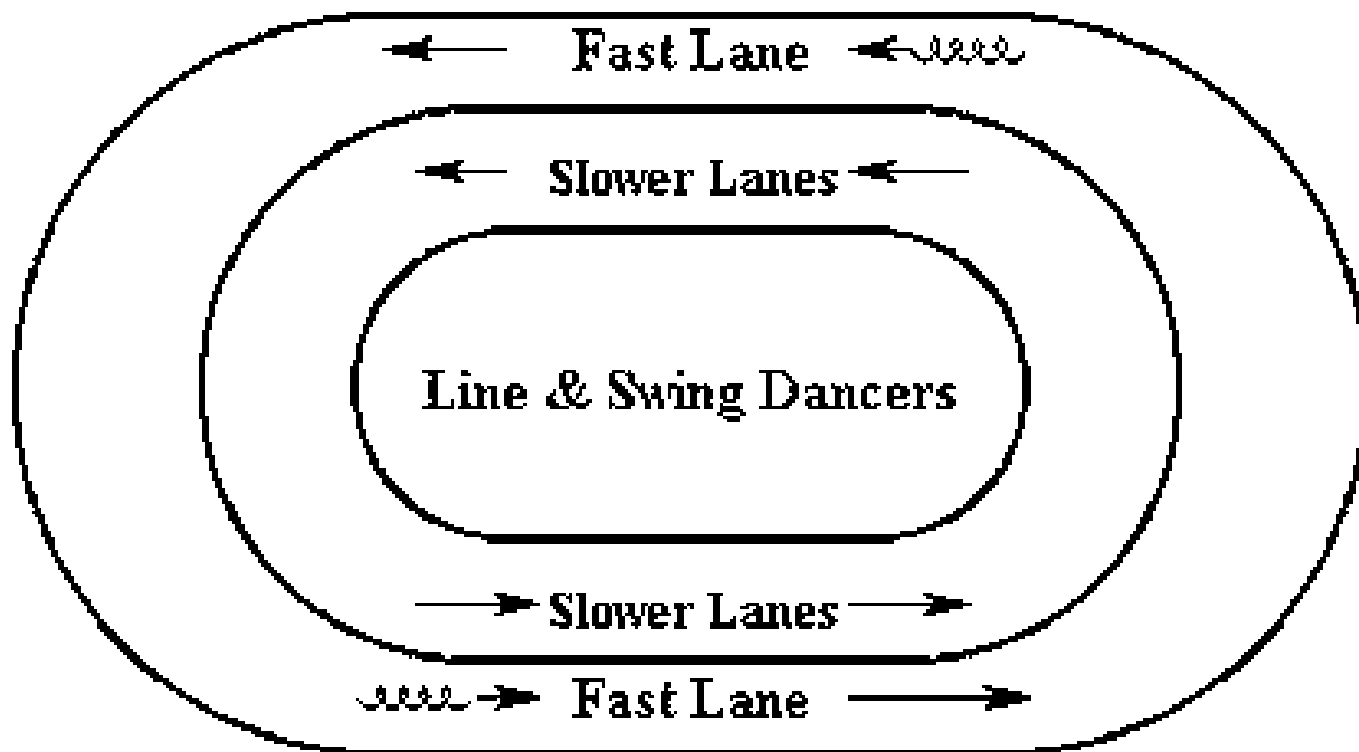
Larry's Corner

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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

If you have anything you would like to write for us, just write it up and give to Barb or Larry.

I enjoy writing something for you. LARRY

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Country-Western Dance Floor Etiquette

The dance floor is divided into concentric lanes like the picture on top of this page. The outside lane is the FAST lane.

Traffic moves around the dance floor in a counter-clockwise direction.

If you are going slow, stay in an inner lane and let people pass you on the outside. The closer you go to the center, the slower you may go.

If you are doing a stationary dance such as a line dance or swing dance instead of a progressive dance, you should dance in the center area of the floor.

Line dancers should never line up out to the rail and block progressive dancers. This gives line dancing a bad reputation. Even if the DJ called a cha-cha or an electric slide, somebody else might want to do a two-step.

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If there are just a few popular line dances done where the floor gets filled up, it is probably better for the progressive dancers to let the line dancers have the floor.

Line dancers should also be aware of those around them and aware that progressive dancers may be coming around the edge of the floor. The faster the song, the smaller the steps! In other words, be careful not to kick someone in the head, step on someone's foot so they can't dance next weekend, or trip someone who is spinning so fast in the fast lane that she doesn't see your fancy legwork sticking out there!

A hardwood dance floor should be treated with care. Drinks (and cigarettes) should never be brought onto the dance floor. When you spill liquid on a hardwood floor, it leaves a dangerous wet spot. Even when it dries, this spot is pretty much ruined for the dancers the rest of the night because it becomes "tacky" and they cannot slide across it.

It's not cool to stand on the dance floor to socialize. Most poor dancers stand around inside the rail. This is the FAST lane on a country-western dance floor. You are likely to entice a big calf roper into scraping you off this rail with his forearm. Look out, those guys work fast! There is not much time before you find yourself on the floor roped, tied, and bawling for your mamma!

Be nice to your fellow dancers and try not to bump into people. Nothing looks worse than great dancers bumping into other people because they really should know better! Since the man is leading, it is his job to keep an eye out for traffic. If you do cause a wreck, smile and look apologetic. You will usually get a smile in return.

If you are a beginning dancer, remember that everyone out there has probably experienced that same sweaty palm, stiff as a board, first time around the floor feeling. It will pass if you can get past the urge to argue with your partner about who blew it. If someone makes a mistake, the best thing is to just smile and keep going! Everyone came to have fun. Hopefully, the experts at your club will be kind enough to give beginners the right of way. It may be fun to watch the experts, but it is just as much or more fun to watch the beginners! It's even kind of fun to watch old married couples argue.

I've also heard single ladies talking about how hard it is to get asked to dance. My advice is to try standing near the opening to the dance floor, smile, tap your foot, look around behind you, and get a look on your face that you really NEED to dance to this song. Dance with the first person who asks. Once you get out there a couple of times with different partners, the available dance partners know you won't turn them down.

I don't mean to offend anyone, but it is my opinion that if you want to look western, you should not take country-western dance lessons from a ballroom instructor unless they have a real clear idea of the differences. If you want to dance and dress ballroom, that's different. I have seen many fantastic ballroom dancers on a country-western dance floor. They sure paid their cover

charge too and deserve to be there just as much as anyone else! But nothing looks funnier to me than a rhinestone cowboy doing hand and toe pointing moves like John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever. Ballroom and country-western both have their places, but I, personally, don't think the styles should be mixed up.

There is definitely a fork in the road on the way to learning how to country-western dance. Some people learn to do it for competition, and some people just do it for fun. So you have competition, or what I call country-ballroom dancers, and you have social country-western dancers, and they are two different things entirely! Competition dancers have lots of rules and social dancers just have lots of fun!

Just for fun, I'll try to describe some of the more noticeable styles of "western" wear too:

- **Country-Ballroom Style:** Matching outfits, fringe, rhinestone hatbands, white pants on men so they show up in spotlights, ladies always wear skirts and "dancing underpants." Sometimes seen changing into tennis shoes before leaving the club!
- **Western Style:** Outfits usually do NOT match, Texas starched Wranglers or Rockies jeans long enough to wear when riding horses, "stacked" over leather-soled boots, hats, big western belt buckles, men wear long-sleeved shirts, and ladies usually wear jeans and look like they can handle a horse (or a cowboy).
- **Yuppie Style:** Short baggie Levi's, artificial snake-skin boots, ladies have purses.

Now don't take this cowboy outfit stuff too seriously. Cowboys don't all look alike. Cowboys pride themselves on their individuality. The shape of their hat is as unique as their personality. A cowboy may take years to settle in on a hat shape, but once he does, you can recognize him from a distance just by his silhouette. Here's an important tip that isn't just for the dance floor: **NEVER touch a cowboy's hat without first asking permission.**

Is more spinning better? No. Most ladies don't like constant spinning give them a break and add other things. Ladies try to keep your center of gravity and Man tries to keep his hand directly over Ladies head during spins.

Leading Continuity Style Ballroom Figures

First, continuity style ('silver') differs from closed foot position style ('bronze') in that the feet pass and a forward or backward step is taken in place of the foot closure at the end of each figure. The overall movement is more continuous, thus 'continuity' style.

The momentum & balance that you carry into the figure determines whether or not you close your feet. For example, in the first half of a closed (bronze) left box turn in waltz or foxtrot, after the right foot has been placed on the side step (step 2), one's center of mass stays over a track directly towards the toes of that foot. Meanwhile, the horizontal component of the force from the floor through the right leg exerts a deceleration oriented directly against that track.

Ideally, the center of mass decelerates to a rest position above a point one foot width short of the toes of the right foot, permitting one to lower directly onto the toes of one's immediately adjacent left foot.

In a continuity (silver) left turn, in contrast, the track of the center of mass begins slightly clockwise from that for the closed left turn. As a result, the horizontal component of the floor force acts to curve the track to the right, rather than stopping it completely. This change in direction means that the gentleman starts moving less and less sideways and more and more backwards, eventually resulting in a backwards step in place of a foot closure. At the closest point, the track of the center of mass is perhaps two foot widths away from the toes of the right foot, rather than one.

But remember now that we want to control the lady's movements, as well as our own. Can we lead her center of mass in a direction that differs from what she expects by only one foot width over the length of a step? And guarantee that she realizes that that small difference is a real lead and not just a mistake? When she doesn't know continuity style and thus only knows of one possible step, not the one we're trying to lead? If we're good enough, the answer should of course be yes, but in my case, I generally find I need a bit more help.

Enter the issue of foot rise.

Before going into how foot rise helps, let's first clarify what it is. It is simply going up on one's toes. When one goes up on one's toes, one's center of mass rises, as a result of a change in orientation of the foot, thus "foot rise". The lady feels the rise with her left hand that is on man's right arm.

This is in contrast to "body rise", which results from a change in the orientation of the torso (it becomes vertical from an initial non-vertical position), and "leg rise", which results from the extension of the knee using the thigh muscles (but not the calves, which are used for foot rise - I guess in ballroom dance, the calves are part of the feet rather than of the legs).

Now, the issue in continuity style is to prevent an early change of weight in the lady. With beginner ladies, this can be difficult because beginners generally don't make clean weight changes - whenever their feet get close to each other, there's a tendency to distribute the weight over both feet. The foot that moves next is often unpredictable, especially with unfamiliar step patterns. Those familiar with bronze step patterns may be even more difficult to deal with, as they may be actively trying to change weight in the wrong place for continuity style.

Using a high foot rise helps in two ways. First, it provides more space for the lady's moving foot to pass the supporting foot, as is required for continuity style. The more ankle extension she has with the supporting foot, the lighter will be the other foot's contact with the floor, and the less likely will be an early weight change. Second, it makes the lady plant her weight more firmly on the supporting foot, again lessening the chances of an early weight change. This is particularly true if the rise is not quite complete when the feet pass, so that the lady is still pressing through the supporting foot to follow the rise.

How much foot rise is enough? Within one's physical limits, the more the better. Try the following experiment:

Stand, dance shoes on, with one's heels on a large phone book (2-3 inches thick) and one's toe's on the floor. Now, lift the heels clear of the phone book. That's probably an adequate amount. It will feel like quite a lot, though it doesn't sound like much from the description.

Active Following

In social ballroom dancing where the female is supposed to be literally unaware of what will come next, "back leading" is a clear violation of the intent as well as the spirit of the encounter. Back leading is an attitude problem; when a follower back leads, she's saying that she neither respects nor trusts the leader's ability to lead, to dance or even to select figures. However, in Swing dancing, things aren't quite so chauvinistic! Swing dancing is an improvisational environment and that makes it interesting and exciting to both partners. The best followers will "take over" and surprise the leader with variations during passes, etc. and, also at the end of most any figure.

With "active following" comes a few ground rules: Followers should not steal the lead without having already established an overall sense of "intent to follow" and leaders should not pull followers out of syncopations without having established an "intent to be responsive to the follower's communication." Followers must be able to control their weight during a syncopation - they must not pull or push on the leader.

The leader has to lead and follow in WCS. So ideally, a leader would not only be able to choreograph to phrasing on the fly (and choreograph moves that interpret the music), but also be able to amend them as the follower adds her own moves. Leaders are always, in a sense, following too. They set something in motion, wait to see what happens, and adjust accordingly. (If the follower misses a lead, spins off balance, etc. they have to be ready to respond to the situation). Dancing with an "active follower" takes even more than the usual amount of concentration from the leader because he has to react to the follower's surprises, giving her time to show off, while still recovering smoothly.

While one partner is spinning, a good dancer will use that as an opportunity to "play". While some men object to the woman taking more than two beats to spin or play, you should have no objection to that as long as when you finally lead the woman in, she goes. West Coast Swing has three facets, I dance, she dances and we dance. If you set the woman up to break or "play" and she stands there like a lamppost, you'll be less likely to give her the chance to shine again. If she takes the opportunity then give her the chance more often.

Leading American Style Ballroom Open Figures

Obviously in closed dance position, American smooth style ballroom dancing lead/follows are identical to International, and the technique is also identical. Many American dance positions are the same except for the man's left/lady's right hand positions, and the lead is the same here also. In "close shadow" position (the man and woman both facing forward, man behind and to the left, the lead here is STILL the same, since the bodies are in the same relative position except that the woman is turned around. Hand positions are different, but the man's right elbow is in the same position as in closed hold. All these leads are "body leads" progressing from the floor, through the feet, legs, and center body, to the woman's center body.

This same "body lead" progression works in the more open positions, except that if there is a hand to hand connection, the lead progresses from the man's center body through his arms to the woman's arms which are theoretically connected to her center body. The techniques here are similar to Latin.

When the partners are completely apart, as in a free spin, the woman uses the indication from the man that led them apart as a guide to movement (how many turns, what direction, etc.) and does something within the logical structure of the dance in terms of rise/fall and rhythm. At the collection point, the man makes adjustments to the lady's position, picks whatever part of the lady is handy, typically hand or hands or his right hand on her center body, attempts to connect the two bodies into one unit, and prepares to swing into the next figure.

After the movement, the man has to figure out what happened, often "fake" to get on the proper foot, adjust his position to match the woman's, and re-establish some sort of center body connection.

When the partners are apart for more than a measure or so great fun socially the leads are totally visual. Normally the woman follows the man, but in my case I am often following (i.e. chasing) my partner, and trying to match her movements until I re-establish contact. The entire process has been summed up as a continuing progression of:

- The man suggests a movement ("leads")
- The lady does something she considers logical ("follows")
- The man adjust to her position ("figures out what happened")
- They both collect together ("back together")

It is interesting to me that International Style dancers are very well trained in leading and following techniques as they apply to the myriad of positions and movements in Latin, but have no concept as to how similar ideas apply to smooth dance movements (which tend to be simpler). The techniques are the same, it's only the type of movement that is different. If the bodies are connected in some logical fashion and the leader does a strong movement, like lowering and swinging the body, the follower gets the message, and amazingly enough, often does a similar complimentary movement.

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