

# Larry's Corner

Volume 6, Issue 04

Read online at <http://www.dancempls.com>

April 2006

Or <Http://www.comedancewithus.com>



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

## *Inside this issue:*

Teaching The Leading And Following Of Slows And Quicks

1

Teaching On The Dance Floor

3

## **Teaching The Leading And Following Of Slows And Quicks**

By my observation, most dance classroom instruction is directed at leaders, even when classes are co-taught by a leader/follower team. And when a teacher is a male/leader, instruction to followers is often phrased in the negative ("Don't anticipate" or "Don't do this because it makes it difficult for the leaders") rather than in the positive ("Keep the tone in your arm, and let the leader indicate where you are to move"). Following is not merely the absence of bad habits, of knowing what NOT to do. Teachers know this, but their actions do not always reflect it.

Toddlers all learn to babble before they can learn to talk with proper diction. Though we all first learn to talk this way, note that this is not the way to teach language to adults; their brains are wired differently. Ballroom dancing is like a language. I think it important to teach partner dance skills as a language, as you say, but the way you'd teach it to adults:

1. the alphabet has positions -- and here are closed, promenade, and offset positions; let's see what they feel like...
2. the punctuation has movement and rhythm -- slows and quick-quicks; let's see how they feel when combined with the alphabet of positions...
3. words are "steps" that use the alphabet and the punctuation... some simple ones we'll look at now are the magic step, the left turn, and a couple of patterns with SSSS and QQQQ
4. sentences are amalgamations of steps, and before the course is out we'll do a few of

those...

Adults are capable of assimilating this kind of organization, and using it to speed the learning process beyond the kind of rote learning required for small children. If you consciously organize the instruction this way, and make the organization known to the students, you can make it very interesting and it will better prepare students for real dancing. They will learn that dancing is a language, rather than a frozen set of steps and amalgamations. As it is, there are too many (studio-trained) partners who are terribly insecure as soon as you get off the schoolbook amalgamations.

Foxtrot comprises the following two most basic counts:

- quick-quick
- slow

All other combinations, including SSQQ and SQQS, and many others such as QQQQ and SSSS, are made up by combining these. Beginners are often taught to expect either SSQQ or SQQSQQ when they follow. It takes some unlearning for them to become real foxtrot dancers. The above is a good example of how teaching "the count" (either SSQQ or SQQSQQ) fools followers. If they were simply taught to follow S and QQ and expect no such thing as "the count" we would all be better off. Example: when I lead natural right turn with the rhythm SSQQSSSSQQ I find that some women are unable to accept the fact that four slows can occur in a row. Their brain forces them into a quick-quick after two or three slows.

To prevent this, I teach foxtrot thusly:

- Not tell them that SQQ or SSQQ is "the count". Instead, tell them that the basic steps are S and QQ. Count S and QQ randomly to real foxtrot music so they can hear it in the music. Explain to them that the critical property of foxtrot music is that you can do SSSS... to it, and can replace any S by QQ.

Teach them to lead and follow SSSS... as many as the leader wants changing the direction of S arbitrarily.

IF THEY CAN'T DO THIS THEY  
CAN'T DO FOXTROT!

Then teach them to lead and follow SSSS... punctuated by random occurrences of QQ. All possible combinations of directions would be included.

IF THEY CAN'T DO THIS THEY  
CAN'T DO FOXTROT!

Once they can lead and follow this, add traditional patterns:

SQQ SQQ ... (box and other waltz patterns)  
SSQQ SSQQ (magic rhythm)  
mixtures of these

When I encounter a beginning student who confuses SSQQ basic with SQQ I often try to break up the step and 'practice' just forward walks (SSSSSSS) and side steps (QQQQQ left or right) in closed position. When these work I try various combinations of SSSSQQQQ just to practice the point. Then I stick to the school figure. In this case, for practice, I would talk and agree on the plan. Spontaneity can come later.

1. The 'basic' step isn't just Forward-Forward-Side-Together or SSQQ but a "pattern moving down the line of dance in closed position composed of forward walks and also has side steps." One should be able to lead and follow any simple variant (eventually).

It's easier to practice things in isolation. When practicing a series of slow walks, we both can concentrate on the walking action, lead and follow, rise and fall. When practicing a series of side rocks we can concentrate on that feeling also. When we practice changing direction from forward to side we can concentrate on the gathering, momentum change or whatever.

Each step encompasses many techniques,

*(Continued on page 3)*

movements and positions. If necessary, break it down and work on one at a time. I also don't try rhythm changes, syncopations or too many variants to make the point. Keep it simple - and get back to the basic which wasn't working when you started.

Other beginning school figures illustrate other techniques or positions: promenade position, offset, parallel partner, or moving backward.

The next level of the same concept is a student who follows the basic (closed position) patterns, but 'refuses' to follow offset position leads, trying to keep in closed position whatever distortions are required. Usually she hasn't been introduced to the offset position and feels it's 'wrong'.

One can execute any number of slows, backwards or forward, in offset position just to practice the feeling (learning situation) or just because that's what I felt like executing to the music (real-time dance situation). It's not required to stay with the school figures - though they do usually run the list of techniques.

When teaching foxtrot timing I call the Basic in American Style.

and Step, and Step, Quick, Quick.

1 2 3 4 5 6

By calling the Slows "and step" it helps in getting the student to delay the weight change to the second beat. I have found that technique is the key to good timing. Remembering that the legs are there to hold up the body, so they should be under the body. Also try to push off the opposite leg in any step that has direction (fwd., back, side)

### Teaching On The Dance Floor

"Do not teach on the dance floor." Men, it's a breach of social dancing etiquette to presume that just because you lead, you know more. Ladies - do not presume to critique a guy's

lead/style/interpretation of the music or judgment. This is social dancing, not practice. If and only if, the lady (or gentleman) requests it, an area off the floor may be used to talk the lady through the step. If you can't talk her through it, you don't understand it well enough to teach it!

"If you are the type that is open to criticism, ask other dancers to help you with your dancing. Perhaps they see or feel something that you do not. It is okay to talk during a dance and you might learn something valuable at the same time other than where the person is from." There are some people who have no plans of ever taking lessons. These people depend on sensitively made suggestions, informal intermission time lessons, and experience to become better dancers.

Dance is a marvelous form of social interaction. It can make you many friends - or it can isolate you from the very people you would like to know. Here are some rules of the dance floor:

- Don't teach someone on the dance floor unless they ASK you to do so.. (Un-asked for advice is not only bad manners - it is unacceptable behavior.)
- Don't criticize a partner no matter how much you would like to. (Your job is to make the dance FEEL better from YOUR side. Just like LIFE the only person we can really change is ourselves.)
- "Don't criticize yourself out loud no matter how much you'd like to". It is not enjoyable to have a partner with whom I've just had a blast dancing with apologize and make comments that she needs more lessons or something like that. Sometimes this happens when they made a few mistakes, usually which a bad lead had something to do with, or I've led them successfully through things they weren't familiar with but

they followed beautifully.

- Dance to the understanding level of your partner to the best of your ability. Have FUN for a three minute relationship. Make your partner have fun. Put JOY in the dance and share the JOY with every partner.

Dancing is a social activity and therefore etiquette overrides EVERY OTHER consideration. Classes and practice sessions are one thing, dancing in public is another. We all know people who practice competition routines in public or do a samba lesson right on the dance floor while the band is playing a waltz. This is rude and offensive to other dancers in the venue. More topical is the question of being rude to our partners. I know some people who can't STOP teaching (They should just be leading the step correctly, or to the level of dance the follower is at. I don't know why they do it but it is annoying to many followers (Or what about the followers who can't stop back-leading or offering suggestions?) Remember that there are many people out there who are not obsessed about dance. They just like to spend a few hours every now and then moving to music, having fun. They don't care about correct steps or proper technique or line of dance or whatever. You must first consider who you are dancing with, what their abilities and preferences are.

No matter how well or how badly I dance, my mission out on the dance floor with a lady who has consented to dance with me is to provide her with enjoyment from our brief dance encounter. That objective should be mutual. If you have any other mission out on the dance floor in a social dance situation, review your motives. You are not out there to prove how wonderful you are, how marvelous you look or how much better you are than your partner. In a social dance situation you are dancing with and for your partner. There is a time and place for learning and it is not in the middle of a social dance floor during a social dance, even if it is requested! Refrain from doing it. Consider it

as being rude. Very rude. If your new partner's dancing is not suitable to you it is necessary that you prevail through to the end of the dance and say, "Thank you!" It is not your obligation to give them a critique of their dancing ability from the dance you just experienced, no matter how bad you might feel it was.

Competitions training, seminars, mutual help sessions where everyone is there for the sole purpose of learning or improving are quite another case. It is understood that in those identifiable learning situations you are invited to offer gentle and constructive criticism to your partner. If you are not capable of this sort of tender, gentle & constructive criticism, let others who are better equipped handle it.

Remember that dancing should be fun. Don't sweat it if you "Flub and mess up a pattern." Do what you can, and enjoy what you do. Agree with your partner, in advance, that you'll put fun first. Don't make an issue of each other's errors; those made at the ballroom are cues for what to practice later.

### **Come Dance With Us**

[Http://www.comedancewithus.com](http://www.comedancewithus.com) Or  
<http://www.dancempls.com>

If you want to read dance storys they are under  
Headlines.

Larry L Ablin : [lablin@frontiernet.net](mailto:lablin@frontiernet.net)

Phone: 952-898-3513

Barb Johnson : [westcoast65@frontiernet.net](mailto:westcoast65@frontiernet.net)

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.

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

\*\*\*\*\*