

Larry's Corner

Dance Etiquette Advanced Dance

Ok, you've been dancing for years. When you dance, people clear the floor. You've worked hard and are a skilled dancer. Yet, some pretty basic etiquette rules still apply for you as well. Most involve the use of floor space, and the "gentle" use of some of those skills. Finally, some special Etiquette (i.e. a higher standard) applies to teachers.

Let me start by acknowledging a simple truth. As you become a more advanced dancer, the ability to express yourself from and through the music greatly increases. You no longer have to count, nor think about "what am I going to do next"? Your body is now comfortable doing all the moves (yes, even the neck wrap, and drop). The dance becomes,



and your personal interpretation of the music.

I'm dancing, and I am in to the music. I'm really enjoying it, and the amount of space I'm using is good. Pretty soon, I've cleared a nice area around myself, and I'm just flying through this dance. Then, out of nowhere, this total beginner couple dances right smack into my dance space, and starts practicing! I just can't believe it . . . right next to me, flinging his partner (and her shoes) dangerously close to my (and my partner's) heels. Ok, one of two things can happen at this point. I can either take my space back, which isn't very difficult, or, I can utilize my years of dance training to rein myself in a little. What did I do? Did I hustle this brand new dance couple off the floor because their drunken obliviousness interrupted my

dance? That certainly would not have left them with a good feeling about their first trip to a dance!

It ultimately is going to be determined by the specific facts of the situation you are in (and your mood at the time), but dance etiquette urges restraint! Rein it in, keep it tight, and give them a little more space. It takes a great dancer to dance fast and smooth in a very small space. I'm not saying it's easy to dance with speed and grace even in a large space, but I am saying that to do it in a controlled manner, in a smaller space, requires much more skill. Anyone can flail at enormous speed in a vast space. We see it all the time.

The Rule: Even more so than beginners, advanced dancers have a responsibility to be aware of their surrounding. As a beginner, you may not have the requisite skill to avoid another couple. As an advanced dancer, there's no such excuse.

Teachers: Pure and simple, teachers set the example for their students. In many ways, students emulate their teachers not only in

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their style, but in how they approach the entire "dance scene". I've actually seen a teacher, who shall of course remain nameless, clear space for themselves in the most alarming manner imaginable. As an example, these teacher's, while dancing on the edge of the floor, had a couple encroach upon their space. The guy was noticeably angry at this, and on a back step (a rather large one), brought the back of his heel crashing down on the back of the encroacher's heel. Needless to say, the encroachers, who had been painfully oblivious to their encroachment, quickly retreated (in quite a bit of pain). No one was injured, no one's life was dramatically changed forever, but a pretty bad precedent was set, not only for the teachers themselves, but for anyone actually watching the "show". The moral of the story is pretty simplistic, as is the story itself. Teacher has to set the example for their students, and keep dancing friendly.

Every class should end with some basic rules about dancing and etiquette. After all, if they don't learn it from you, who exactly are they going to learn it from? The basic rules I recommend,

1) Be aware of those dancing around you,



2) Say you're sorry and acknowledge stepping on somebody.

3) Keep it small, and keep it tight. Grace before speed . . .

Being Asked to Dance by beginners, or in some cases, anyone: In this case, I think I'll start with what I consider to be "the rules", and digress from there.

1) Always be respectful! It's just plain hard to ask someone to dance in the first place, but asking an Advanced Dancer to dance is even more difficult. They know they may not have the skills you do, but they've asked you to dance anyway, and that takes guts. In addition, respect the fact that in our society, women ask men to dance more often than they used to even though they would rather the man ask and thus, it takes more guts, and self assuredness, for women to ask men. Men, be extra-understanding of this!

2) If possible, say yes! By this I

mean, if circumstances permit, and you've been asked to dance, say yes. What circumstances might prevent you from saying yes? A great song, wanting to dance with someone else, getting a drink, the list is endless . . . However, the rule is simple. If you can say yes, do! This is one dance. 3-5 minutes. You might even like it (or you may not).

Now, after stating these basic rules, I'm going to shred them to pieces. Remember these rules, as I tell you a few real life stories!

I remember, years ago, asking this fantastic dancer to dance. I mean, she was awesome. She looked me up and down, and asked me quite simply, "are you any good"? I had to answer, "well, I'm a beginner", because hell, it was true. With a look of absolute distaste, she said "I don't dance with beginners", and turned away from me. I was pretty crushed. Now, I might have stomached this better if my friends hadn't been watching the entire exchange, but of course, they had. Fast forward Twenty eight years, and I still remember this exchange! Must have been pretty powerful eh? Since then I've learned that being turned down for a dance isn't that bad a fate, however at the time, it was a powerful motivator to get better. I suppose some people are

better at taking rejection than others.

Fast forward a few years! I probably shouldn't write this, but since it happened, I thought I'd relate another personal experience. After a so-so band, the DJ finally decided to play some Cuban music. I felt great (because I love Cuban music) and I was ready to dance. Right when, one of my favorite bands starts playing, out of nowhere, this woman comes up, grabs me by the hand, and says, (I kid you not), "you must dance with me". Now, this is one great song, and I was bee-lining for Another great dancer, but what the hell, I said yes. As I lead her out on the floor, the real pain set in. She says "this is my first night dancing, and you absolutely have to teach me everything". Oh god! But I'm still ok, the music is just too good. However, as we dance, she continually asks me questions, stops to converse, etc . . . "How do I do this?" , "Am I doing this right?" Etc . . . All I want to do is dance! The entire 4 minute event bummed me out. After the dance I made sure to lead her back to her table, and offer to get her a teacher's card for local lessons, but by that time, I really needed a dance. In retrospect, I could have handled it better by being a bit firmer with her (i.e. Thank you, but not this dance, maybe in a bit), but at the time, for



whatever reason, it just didn't occur to me. Granted, if I had been having good dances all night to great music, this probably wouldn't have been a very big deal, but since I hadn't yet had that one good dance, I was kind of yearning for it.

So, what is the moral of that story?

I certainly don't want to turn off beginner dancers from asking people to dance, because that is the best way to get better, and I want to greatly encourage it, and I do encourage it. However, I also want these same people to take no with a grain of salt, and understand what might be behind it. These are two very different stories, one from each angle.

Moral #1, It is better to give than to receive. Whoever thought of this really pisses me off, but alas, it's got some tiny, miniscule bit of merit somewhere. Here was my chance

to bring someone new into the dance world, and show them what a great time can be had dancing to the music. Should that make me feel like I missed out on a great dance? Or should it make me feel like I've just done a pretty nice thing?

Moral #2, in the final account, you, and everyone around you, is out at clubs to have a good time. That means, in a nutshell, you have the right to say no, and dance with whom you want to dance, when you want to dance. In retrospect, I should have just said, "I'd love to dance with you, but I've promised this dance to someone else" and left it at that, possibly returning later.

One final note, I love seeing teachers dancing with their students. In fact, recently, I've noticed a change in the scene. When I go out and dance I see more and more teachers out at the clubs, having a good time. When I see teachers, who I of course will not name, that I see out dancing a lot, dancing with everybody, and I mean, everybody, I just think that's cool. Always looking like they're having a good time, regardless of the level of their partner, or the song that comes on. Not being obsessed with how they look, or who's watching them. That's just very cool and very rare.

I used to ask my students to dance and they would get so nervous they shake. So I tell my classes that if they feel comfortable they can come ask to dance. That way they are not so nervous.

Preview: Some teachers, you never see dance with their students. Some advanced dancers, you never see dance with a beginner. We were all beginners at one point, what do you think the rules are?

Dance Etiquette and Beyond

Success in a social activity requires awareness of accepted behavior. The importance of dance etiquette to the social dancer can hardly be over stated. Etiquette is important everywhere, but especially in dancing, a delicate activity where unpleasantness has no place.

Dance communities tend to be fairly small, giving a nice self-enforcing characteristic to dance etiquette. Rude individuals may temporarily enjoy themselves at other dancers' expense. But they quickly develop a reputation, mostly unbeknownst to them, and become outcasts. A good reputation, as a considerate and enjoyable partner, is a social dancer's best asset.

In the following we touch on a few of the more important aspects.



Never blame your partner for anything that may happen on the dance floor. Not if you want him / her to dance with you again.

A request for a dance must be accepted under almost all circumstances. If you decline a dance, you yourself cannot dance until the end of that song.

No unsolicited teaching on the dance floor! There is a good chance this will make your partner feel small and humiliated. Not exactly a great way of encouraging him/her, or others, to dance with you.

Do not monopolize a partner on the dance floor. Dancers are polite and rarely say no to a dance, but this is no carte blanche to impose on their kindness. Dance with everyone, and let everyone dance.

On the floor, be considerate of the other couples. Exercise good floor

craft; do not cut other couples off. No aerials or choreographed steps on the dance floor. What we discussed so far is usually considered the domain of dance etiquette.

Anyone who consistently violates the rules of dance etiquette will eventually be shunned in the local dance community, so the first step towards success in dancing is to follow the rules of dance etiquette.

Once we have mastered the etiquette, it is time to move beyond it and learn what else we can do to become popular in the dancing circles.

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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