



Larry's Corner



Ballroom vs. Ballet

Continued from last month

I just checked, and with turnout from the hips only, I can get my thighs to point outward at an angle of about 130 degrees, with the feet pointing in the same direction. But I agree this is more than an average person.

I also agree that in the natural turn I'm currently getting the remaining five degrees from the ankles. That's why I'm doing those stretches, so I won't have to use turnout at the ankles any more.

Now, I actually agree that a small amount of turnout at the ankles can look okay. However, I find that the closer I can keep my ankles to acting like hinge joints, the more power I can get out of my feet. So I'm trying to train myself not to use any turnout at the ankle.

Actually, the weight doesn't transfer from left heel to right toe on 5, but from left ball to right ball (even if the left heel is very close to the floor). Even more accurately, the inside edge of the left ball.

Do you push out of the right

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foot on the back half of a slow waltz natural? The action you describe implies that you would push out of the inside edge of the ball of the foot, basically a sideways push. To me, this hurts even to think about.

I feel that I can get much more power by pushing out of the heel. I'm pushing backwards, relative to the angle of the knee, rather than sideways, and that allows me to use the large muscles along the front of the left leg. I also get an extra inch or two of distance by keeping the foot aligned with the leg.

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Interestingly enough, this axiom applies to just about any skill. As a general rule, the best ballroom dancers also start at around 7 or 8. There are exceptions to this rule... then again, there are also exceptions in ballet.

The ballet dancer must physically "mold" his or her body, musculature, and bone structure in a certain way. The later in life one tries to do this, the less likely they will be to succeed. The ballroom dancer has a body which is closer to the natural human form. So the requirement to start early for the purpose of molding the body is not necessary, but starting early to learn the skills is.

The fact that ballroom lessons can be begun as an adult and that adult can go on to a professional level tells you something.

Yeah it tells me that what is called "Professional" in America is absolutely embarrassing. I mean, my mom could take one ballet class tomorrow, and then call her a professional. That doesn't mean that she actually is one.

Anyone who expects to get anywhere as a professional competitive ballroom or Latin dancer is subject to the same level of standards as anyone who expects to get anywhere as a professional ballet dancer in a

company. You got to start early, you got to work your butt off for hours daily, and you got to do it for a long time to get good.

In addition, ballroom can be started or continued by senior citizens. Hardly the case with ballet.

I saw a ballet class level 5-6 a few years back that had an 88-year old lady in it. The fact is, a person can enjoy any style of dance as a hobby, starting at any point in their life. This doesn't mean that they'll be any good. I am not implying that a person who starts ballroom dancing as a senior citizen has any hope of having a professional competitive career!

I have no problem with the idea that ballet is more physically demanding than ballroom. It's the implication that it requires more skill that makes me laugh. Skill and physical strength is not the same thing. If they were, then it would take a lot more skill to be a drummer than to be a pianist.

The ballet dancer must physically "mold" his or her body, musculature, and bone structure in a certain way. The later in life one tries to do this, the less likely they will be to succeed. The ballroom dancer has a body which is closer to the natural human form. So the requirement to start early for the purpose of molding the body is not necessary.

Actually, there's quite a bit of body molding going on in ballroom, too - and it's different for Standard than for Latin. The Standard dancers preferentially build calves (also true for ballet), while the Latin dancers preferentially build thighs.

My belief is that dancers start early - the prevailing European opinion in ballroom seems to be you'd better have started by age 4 or you'll never get anywhere - because it takes a long time to build muscle just by dancing. If you are willing to do brute force strength training, you can do it much faster, and successfully start much later.

I have no problem with the idea that ballet is more physically demanding than ballroom. My experience is that ballet dancers are not stronger than ballroom dancers of comparable dedication and experience.

Demo Dolly

(Don't take this too seriously!) ;)

The **demo dolly** is a term that refers to a partner whose sole goal and purpose is to show off their partner, and make them look good. It was originally coined by a male teacher in the Bay Area (whom shall remain nameless) for his beautiful female dancing partners, as they would generally remain silent, and help him demonstrate his moves making him look like a

god.

The demo dolly has many uses, and I'll explain some right after this short story. When I tell people that I am sometimes turned down when I ask women to dance, they all appear shocked. I mean, why would I get turned down? I know how to dance right? I'm ok looking right? ;) Well, guess what? It happens to everybody, and I do mean everybody! Nobody bats 1000! Men and women alike are going to be turned down for a dance at sometime in their lives. In fact, once again, it happened to me a while ago. But would it have happened if had a demo dolly? Probably not, and here's why!

That night, I was at a new club, in San Francisco where no one knew me. I was dressed rather poorly having just come from a work out, and I was asking someone I had never seen before for a dance in English, at a very Latin club, which didn't help things. I got a simple "no", which always serves to tick me off as I find it rude. Well, since there were no dancers present, I had to sit and wait for someone to dance with. Being in San Francisco, it didn't take long for a fantastic dancer to show up! After my first dance with her, I wasn't turned down for the rest of the night.

A "demo dolly" serves to show people that "Hey, you actually can dance" and "I have some semblance of rhythm". It answers those all important questions that plague those people whom you ask to dance. Will he step on my feet? I won't step on your feet. Will he make me look like an idiot? I won't make you look bad or silly not that it should matter, but it does to many people, and I, most importantly, won't flail around uncontrollably. Generally, when you have a demo dolly, they are going to make you look great! After that, not only will you not get turned down for a dance, but you'll generally be asked by people in the club for a dance! It works perfectly.

"BYODD"; Bring Your Own Demo Dolly to new clubs . . . For men and women, this is a big help! This would be a good time to point out that Demo Dolly's can definitely be men! In fact, in many ways, women get more "bang for their buck" with a male demo dolly. Since generally women have to wait for men to ask them to dance, it really helps to have a guy who can "show you off" to the other guys so they feel more comfortable asking you to dance. Oftentimes, for better or for worse, I'll actually wait to see if a woman can dance before asking her myself. If she has a guy to dance with her that can run her through

her skills, well it makes life easier for her. A point of caution for women! If you get shown off too well, it can backfire. Men can easily get intimidated if your male Demo Dolly is too good and show's you off too well. Then they (the men) won't ask you to dance because they are simply afraid that they won't measure up! Got to walk that fine line . . . Get shown off Good, but not too good.

Fortunately, for men, this same logic does not apply! The woman can never make you look too good. Generally, the better you look, the easier your time with all the other women in the club is going to be you can take that line however you want to.

Having traveled over a good part of the world, I can tell you, it makes a huge difference when you have dance partners who can show you off in a new place. Oftentimes I have wished, while in some far off country, I could just have one of my partners from the Minneapolis Area to show these people that I can actually dance! Over and over again, I had to find a dancer whom I didn't know get her to dance with me, and hope for the best. Quite simply, if you have a bad dance in the early night, with someone who is respected in the club you're in, I would always try to dance with the teacher first. You're not going to

find many more good partners that night. Quite the opposite is also true, one good dance in the early part of the night with the right person, can often times bring countless introductions to the other dancers, and a full night of dancing with great new people.

Contrast this however to when I arrived in Kansas City, where I actually did know some Minneapolis Area people, it helped to have them dance with me. I mean, I was never turned down for a dance my entire time there, and I have to attribute that to my excellent Demo Dolly's on that portion of my trip they get to remain nameless as well, although they certainly deserve the recognition! :)

As you can see, Demo Dollies serve an important purpose for both men and women, especially when you are dancing in new locales! Like the American Express card, don't leave home without one . . .

Hustle Slotted

I was able to measure slot lengths in the range of about 1-2 meters (3-6 feet) depending on the height and energy of the dancers. A typical slot was about 1.3 meters (4 feet) in length. The music averages 120 bpm or even a little faster at times. Good dancers will shorten the slot for faster music.

The feet move the full length of the slot, but in most Hustle moves, the center of gravity of the body will move considerably less. Lean back when decelerating, lean forward when accelerating.

To slot or not to slot, that is the question; Depending on what part of the country you're from and how crowded the floor is, Hustle can be danced strictly slotted (a la WCS), in a rotating slot, or as a traveling dance. A lot of Hustle figures work out well when danced in a triangle, e.g. 120 degree turn at each end of the slot instead of 180 degrees. For traveling, I used alternating forward and back grapevines and free spins with an overturned basic exit.

Regarding circle vs. slotted: "It all depends on how the guy leads it and how crowded the floor is."

Some of the verbal history I've heard regarding the origins of Hustle describes it as a rotating or rotating slot dance. What happened is that teachers taught it as a slot dance because it was easier to teach that way. A strict slot allows you to pack a bigger class onto the floor and helps keep beginners from under turning the patterns. Hustle HAS evolved a lot

since the disco era; for one thing, it's now mostly done to slower music (e.g. "Vogue" vs. "Turn The Beat Around") which makes it easier to "close the slot".

All the beginning and intermediate Hustle patterns I've ever seen are taught to begin and end with the slot in the same orientation. Most newcomers, especially those who come to Hustle from ECS, let this fall apart a little bit, especially on faster music. That doesn't make it right. The way some teach it, the slot doesn't "rotate", in the sense that if we start out in a north-south slot, that's the way we stay. Folks who allow the slot to "rotate" are viewed as being sloppy. Perhaps some teach a stationary slot because it's the most appropriate on today's crowded dance floors. Then again, perhaps it's because they are a precisionist, and thinks that's the way the dance should be done.

I learned Hustle as a slot dance. But after watching several old-time Hustle dancers and several top level pros dance it as a rotating slot, I experimented with a rotating slot and found I preferred it to a strict slot for many patterns. A rotating slot the lady travels in a straight line from one end of a slot to another, but doesn't turn an exact 180 degrees for the next slot. allows you to dance geometric figures like triangles and squares. It also allows you to travel the slot across the floor. Hustle used to be circular, but that nowadays it's been modified into a slot dance. The woman moves in a slot. The guy of necessity, make more of an ellipse.

Given the floor space, most Hustle uses as much real estate available and the slot rotate. I paid particular attention to the dancers doing the Hustle. I watched as others used almost every square inch of floor, with slots varying all over the compass. Some teach a stationary slot because it's the most appropriate on today's crowded dance floors. If they do it because they're deliberately trying to use up floor, or as part of patterns that are designed to rotate the slot, that's one thing. If they're doing it because, e.g., they just aren't bothering to get all the way around on a turning closed basic, that's sloppy, and I don't care who they are. Of course, if there is very little room on the floor, a strict slot is sometimes the safe thing to do.

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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