



Larrys Corner

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This is called Larrys Corner because when I teach I stand in the corner so I can see everyone.

If you want to read dance stories they are under Headlines or Larrys 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 about, just write it up and give to Barb or Larry. We enjoy writing something for you.

Come Dance With Us

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Balboa

Very fast, 8-count, partners basically glued together, all footwork. The Balboa was created in, and named for, the Balboa Park Club, an enormous wood-frame building, home of the Naval Officer's Club in San Diego during WWII. The floor is about 13,000 square feet. The Balboa has lots of fast footwork but not much whole-body movement, and was developed as an answer to the question, "what do you dance when the band plays Dixieland jazz?" The Balboa uses a shuffle basic, with short foot movements and overall look optimized for really fast swing music, such as Dixieland. It goes 1-2-3 kick. Balboa is not a swing dance since it has no 6 count patterns, only 4's and 8's -- all swing dances have a 6 count basic pattern.

The Balboa really isn't a style of swing at all. It is danced almost exclusively in closed dance position and most closely resembles a dance the natives of 1930's Chicago called the Shag. The Balboa has an eight count basic but the rhythm pattern isn't like traditional single swing's "slow, slow, quick, quick". "It looks like cartoon dancing, close together, with lots of footwork, although the feet hardly leave the floor. The upper body remains still and the dance doesn't travel much around the room. You could dance to music - 100 to 250 beats per minute! While being dressed up. At one time it was popular up and down the west coast, from Seattle to southern California." Now there are contests all over the world.

Body Position

The dancers stand close, touching upper chest. This makes communication with body language very easy. The man's right front torso (rib cage) touches the woman's center front torso (rib cage). They are offset by about 30 degrees.

Body Lead

There are many variations on how dancers move during the basic step. Each variation looks different. Each variation communicates movement to the follow differently. Dancers do all of the following (from the lead's point of view):

In Balboa dancers Stay in place while doing the footwork.

In Bal-Swing Move back and forth between 2 positions on the floor

In Fox Trot dancers Move in a box: back - side - middle - forward - side - middle.

Regardless of basic variation, the dance is done in place, without any traveling on the floor.

Basic footwork

The Bal-Swing basic is performed to 8 counts of the music, with typical footwork as follows (assuming both dancers shift forward and back between two positions on the floor 4 to 8 inches or 10 to 20 cm apart):

Lead:

Step back with left foot.

Step back with right foot, bringing feet together.

Slide left foot forward.

Slide left foot back beside right foot.

Step forward with right foot.

Step forward with left foot, bringing feet together.

Slide right foot back, bringing heel off the ground.

Slide right foot forward beside left foot.

Follow:

Step forward with right foot.

Step forward with left foot, bringing feet together.

Slide right foot backward, bringing heel off the ground.

Slide right foot forward beside left foot.

Step back with left foot.

Step back with right foot, bringing feet together.

Slide left foot forward.

Slide left foot back beside right foot.

Note that the lead and follow footwork is identical, although offset by four beats. That is, both perform the same footwork when moving backwards and forwards.

In the Original Balboa the dancers do the same or similar footwork utilizing the same rhythm, however it's done in place. To do so easily, the dancers shuffle their feet and avoid stepping, or bouncing.

Also note that some people might argue that the Balboa basic is just "step-step" and any "upholds" (the slide-slide is an uphold variation) are already variations to change direction and/or feet. Not getting too attached to this 8-count basic pattern helps when learning Ad-libs (aka "one-steps") and moves that don't fit into the 8-count scheme, since it's then more natural how to sync back to the music. Especially the follow must be aware that this pattern is just common, and needs to be led into doing the uphold.

Footwork Variations

Dancers vary their footwork, to respond to the music or their partner.

Many footwork variations can be done independently of the partner. The three most common footwork variations are single, double, and triple time.

Single time or down hold: Counts 3-4 and 7-8 are step-holds.

Double time or up hold: Counts 3-4 and 7-8 are kick-steps. This is the most common variation.

Triple time: Counts 3-4 and 7-8 are triple steps.

KEEP IT SMALL

All steps should be not more than about one 8 inches long. Keep knees relaxed, don't wiggle or tilt your hips or torso, pitch your weight slightly forward but don't do a pronounced lean.

It is NOT Impolite to get CLOSE to your partner

The figure is done in the "mush" position: Follower's right leg in line with Lead's sternum, torsos touching, Lead's right arm wrapped well around Follower's back, Follower angled slightly to Lead's right side. There is also contact between the outer forward quarter of the Lead's right thigh and the inner fwd quarter of the Follower's left thigh. Lead's Left hand holds the Follower's Right hand; height of hands is unimportant, but keep the hands close to the body line. Most leads are body/frame leads.

The mush position is relaxed, but as little as possible, for most Bal-Swing figures.

The Leader and follower are not necessarily a man and woman respectively. While roles are often switched for teaching, in competition EVERY pair is man-leader/woman-follower. The terms leader and follower seem SO politically correct (I saw a group class once taught with the terms "the person who dances the part traditionally danced by the man" and "the person who dances the part traditionally danced by the woman", which resulted in a very wordy lesson). Many English coaches seem to use boy and girl, which raises a few hackles, but many fewer than the combination man and girl. Also the traditional International pronouns of man and lady seem mismatched. The counterpart to a lady is a lord. Unfortunately, while in modern usage the term lady has come to mean "woman of good character and social standing," as well as referring to a specific rank in the noble hierarchy, the term "lord" has come to have only the latter meaning, or God. So it wouldn't go over too well to say "lords and ladies." The modern term for "man of good character and social standing" is "gentleman." The terms "gentleman" and "lady" would probably cause the least objections from a sexist standpoint, and they reflect the atmosphere that ballroom dancing promotes; a bit more than just normal, day to day social interaction. Anyway, the point here is that you will find most all these terms used in this lesson (except all occurrences the words boy or girl which have been changed) as they have been traditionally defined. If any of this gets your sensibilities in an uproar, I'm sorry - partner dancing is politically incorrect anyway :-)

Hand Tone

In an Open hold, don't squeeze your partner's hands or crush her with your thumb.

Followers, a firm squeeze of your my partner's hand , arm or right shoulder can be used as a collision warning if he's about to back into someone else.

In any hand hold, partners should not grip one another tightly - The general idea that I like the best for describing hand contact while dancing is to imagine that you are washing each other's hands. If I dance with a woman who hangs too much from me, or uses her thumb to grip me, I'll release all hold, put my hands on top of hers, and use only the skin friction to lead. I can do pushes and left and right passes this way without ever giving her the opportunity to apply the grip of death, if you know what I mean. The next-to-worst injuries I've received while dancing (the worst being stepped on with high heels) have been the results of tight grips... like a grip upon my thumb while my partner was trying to spin. Uh, my thumb - he don't revolve! Ever have a partner clamp down on your upper arm in closed dance position like she was as if hanging on for dear life or trying to pinch it off? Ow!!! It's hard to smile when you're wearing a tourniquet...

Balance

Bend your knees a little while keeping your upper body and shoulders square (don't lean back). Try this balance exercise: Now that you are in this position, have someone else push evenly on both your shoulders and you will notice that you can maintain your balance much better than if you are stiff with knees locked.

Good balance is essential to good dancing. Keep your weight over the balls of your feet. Do not lean back or forward, except for some figures. In general, have a comfortable and stable position over your feet and be able to move in any direction instantly without having to drastically shift your weight to be able to move in the opposite direction - keep your feet close together on turns, don't spread eagle to be grounded, be elegant. Lady can maintain her spins even when her partner is instructed to lead her poorly and try to throw her

off. Followers who are more in control of their own weight can do more things - that's part of why ladies can do that.

Balance And Your Head Position

The human head has significant mass, as well as being at the very top of the body and very easy to throw around. If you're trying to control your balance to within a centimeter or less, as top dancers do, then throwing a heavy weight (head) around, out of sync with what you're trying to do with the entire step is quite detrimental.

Most of the head's mass is in front of the axis of the neck. If you leave your head looking straight forward, then most of the head's weight will be forward of your body's center of gravity. That leads to counter balancing the head weight by sticking out one's butt or leaning on one's partner, neither of which is considered good dance form. If you put your head slightly to one side, then the head weight will be more over on foot and therefore less likely to require body or frame distortions to counter-balance the head weight.

Try the following exercise with your partner: You and your partner must each take closed dance position, bodies against each other, with the arms out and somewhat forward to maintain a convex back (keeping the spine as the most posterior portion of the anatomy). Then try to lead her. By holding the arms out and slightly forward and up but not touching each other, it is possible to practice movement w/o relying on the arms AND maintain proper frame. It should work for a waltz, if you are really good, you can lead a Viennese waltz. You'll immediately feel how important the balance of the couple is. Yes, you will feel, when your partner moves her head! (Note: For proper movement and frame, you must maintain a 'forward poise'.)

Spotting

Some people say you should "spot", i.e. face your partner while your body turns underneath. If you do spot, you need to make sure your shoulder's do not lean or twist, and your head must be straight up with the center of balance exactly over your spine. If you are slightly off, your head can unbalance the turn. To help in this regard, when spotting, look at an object that is high on the wall - not low. Spotting is difficult and can lead to wobbling at first. Probably wobbling is the most common problem people have spinning, and is caused by a bad lead pulling you off balance, not having your center of balance over your feet, or a poorly aligned body. Most of the people who have trouble spinning seem to have a bent or twisted body and tend to wobble. Practicing a paddle turn is a good way to find your balance and body alignment. Another cause for wobble is if your arms are extended out. If you extend your arms to regain balance during a spin, it will probably throw you off balance even more. You probably want to keep your free wrists at your waist. Practice spotting in slow motion, many times in each direction, concentrating on smooth head rotation (from looking over one shoulder to the other) on a vertical axis (use a mirror - it's easy to rotate your head about a canted axis, and it looks terrible. Plus your head weighs something like 20 lbs and it's up high, so it's effect on your balance will be magnified.). The biggest tip is this: Pick a specific object (like your partners' left eye) and consciously fix your gaze upon it before you initiate your turn. Then as soon as your head begins to come around, you must "lock" back onto it.

Spotting is purely for control and aesthetics. Spotting prevents dizziness; you get dizzy when you see the room going around you, whereas when you spot you only see one thing over and over again. Spotting does not help you provide the impetus for a turn - rather it helps refine your turns - your arms, legs and body provide the impetus. Spotting makes a turn look more precise because it provides you with a horizon and a reference point which help you to stop cleanly and with balance. To really look good doing an UAT, you need to spot before going under, then go under the arm, then pivot around affixing your gaze 180 when coming out. Remember, people primarily look at a dancer's head!

One of the easiest methods to learn how to spot your turns is to do it sitting down in an revolving office chair. Your body doesn't have to do much work and you can concentrate on the spotting exercise. Important safety tip: if you are over-dedicated, you can keep a barf bag on your lap.

Since a follower should always be watching her partner, it's important very early on for the follower to spot her turns. As a leader, I learned to turn long before I started spotting my turns. Usually I would just let my body memory do 1/2, 1, 1&1/2, or 2 turns. When I started working on spinning to closed position I found out that spotting is essential. When you are more aware of your partner, you can dance closer, and you can try more daring moves.