

# Larry's Corner

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## Come and Dance with us

Do you have a story 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 don't know me my picture is on the back page

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## How To Dress For Dancing

Dancing is a contact sport! Remove keys etc. from your front pockets before stepping onto the dance floor. Then take off your watches, rings and bracelets! Watches and bracelets, especially when worn on your right wrist, tend to scratch your partner's hand, arm, and/or neck. No extravagant belt buckles either! You can test what you choose to wear to determine if it is hazardous by rubbing your hand over it. Jewelry, of course, should be very carefully chosen. Be sure to check your rings, bracelets, and belts for sharp edges or even small points that can catch in your partner's clothing or jewelry. Long necklaces can also be hazardous, particularly if you're a fast spinner. Long chains with heavy broaches that can be hazardous when you spin. Same goes for long hair, particularly pony tails.

Sylvia (of Jonathan and) Sykes has extremely long hair that she braids and pins to her chest. The way she spins, her hair would be lethal! Ladies, avoid high hair, doubly-so if sprayed. And don't forget to check your fingernails and any imperfections they might have that could damage someone's clothes - if there's anything wrong, borrow a nail-



Barb and Larry at TGIS Dance

file.

Regardless of gender, when selecting an upper-body garment for dancing, it is very important that it be cut high in the arm pits and not have baggy or loose sleeves that can interfere with your partner getting a hand to your back.

Aside from the inconvenience, such garments can also be dangerous as a leader might be looking for a way to get around your garment rather looking to avoid other dancers. You may even have to baste shut men's long sleeve shirt cuffs because the

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## How To Dress For Dancing

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buttons can get caught in the lady's hair. The waist and bodice should also not have excessive fabric. Not that you should wear skin-tight garments nor even tight-fitting ones, only that excessive fabric can create problems and accidental undesired body contact. You should also avoid lace where your partner's hands are likely to be (on the dance floor :-). Jewelry can sometimes catch on lace or other loose weaves.

Long skirts that fly out when you spin can often be an interference. This is particularly true when they're cut so that they fly out from higher than mid-thigh. The shorter the skirt, the higher the fly-point can be. Long skirts provide the lovely sight of flowing fabric, but it's very important that there be enough room for the leader to get his knee between the follower's legs; many skirts prevent that. For men who have to wear a jacket and tie to an event: take off the jacket and tie when you dance!



Char and Larry at  
SAT SIG Fair

Be sure to wear an undershirt - sweat spots show much worse on your typical dress shirt than they do on the multi-colored rayon shirts so many of us wear as standard dance fashion. Avoid silk shirts without an undershirt.

This is a personal view of what women should and should not wear to facilitate the mechanics of Social Dancing, written by a man. I think the same general ideas apply to all forms of Social Dancing.

**UPPER BODY:** Leaders and Followers must have quick and easy access to their partners' backs. Therefore sleeves should be cut high into the armpit and not have very loose cloth above the waist line, particularly the upper arms. Sleeveless tops are just fine, too.

I'm very uncomfortable trying to Lead from a bare back that's slippery with sweat. I much prefer fabric that covers the shoulder blades or anywhere else with which I'm likely to have manual contact. I also prefer zippers to buttons because the spaces between buttons are often entered thus allowing contact with slippery skin or bra straps. Garments that expose the stomach are also undesirable for the same reasons as bare backs.

Very clothe upper body garments can conceal exactly where we don't want our hands to go on the dance floor.

Sometimes dancers I know wear such garments and, if they're wearing a different bra, might not be where I know they were.

The need for dance floor wax usually is a result of wearing improper boots or shoes for dancing.

And, please, unless you're so small-breasted that you don't need a bra, wear one!

**LOWER BODY:** I think pantsuits are not only attractive and flattering, but particularly suitable for Swing dancing.

Pants of any kind are just fine. For the mechanics of dancing, pants have no negative qualities.

Long skirts are fine if they're loose enough to, at knee level, pass a bit farther than to the backs of the thighs. Long skirts can also be a nuisance if they're cut so that they fly high. Bell cuts work well, though.

After pants, short skirts from about 4" above the knee are best. But not tight ones. Extremely short tight skirts are usually not a problem to dance with but can be a nuisance for the wearer. I find that short skirts that flare are best not only to dance with but to watch, even those that are cut to expose nothing but leg.

**JEWELRY:** Jewelry, in particular, should be selected with extreme care. Before putting on a bracelet, watch, brooch, or ring, you should pass your hand over it to ensure that it has no sharp edges that can cut or points that

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## How To Dress For Dancing

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can catch in clothing.

Brooches, best not worn, should be placed high on the chest where contact with your Leader's clothing is least likely.

Necklaces should be no longer than the top of the cleavage/ bottom of the chest.

**BELTS:** About once a month, it seems, a belt hook will slip under someone's ring and bring us to a halt to disconnect. Haven't gotten hurt yet but I have broken a few belt buckles. Belt closures covered by the fabric of the belt are best. Belts with numerous articulations, particularly those of metal, can be quite hazardous. I will not dance with certain types of them.

**HAIR:** When Sylvia Sykes had a waist-length braid of great thickness, she pinned it to her chest thus alleviating any hazard it could cause. The way she spins, a blow from that braid would have been disabling! Unless your hair is extremely fine and soft, resulting in a gentle brush of your partner's face, it can not only be painful when striking a face but hazardous if it slashes through an open eye. If your hair falls below the top of your shoulders, you should style it in such a way that it will not fly

Towel - One good wipe between dances can make a difference!

into contact with your partner.

You should avoid hair styles that require being held by spray. If you're a very experienced dancer capable of controlling your Leader's hand position over your head, you know what you're doing. But if you're not, the hair atop your head should be rather close to it in order to avoid getting really messed up. Besides, if you're dancing properly, you'll sweat enough to mess up the lovely look you had when you left home, anyway.

**HATS:** Unless you're in a C/W competition that requires 'em, leave 'em at the check room.

### What to Carry with You to A Dance

Things to carry with you to a dance on a regular basis:

- Dance shoes
- Notepad and pen to take note of new step, or exchange telephone numbers. :-)
- Comb or Brush
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, chewing gum, breath mints, mouthwash
- Earplugs
- Ibuprofen
- Paper fan, several towels, and handkerchiefs
- Extra shirt & T-shirt (2 extras for swing dancing), deodorant
- Plastic grocery bag (for sweat-soaked clothing)
- Shoe brush
- Spare shoelaces
- Water bottle, dehydration

makes you weak.

- Safety pins, clothes tend to split.

- Band-Aids, accidents happen when dancing close.

- Towel - One good wipe between dances can make a difference! Nothing is worse than a sharp head snap in my direction that flings sweat drops in my eyes... well maybe when a dancer (either leader or follower) wipes their hand across their face during the dance and then hands it to you for a lead (or follow)...

- Dance floor wax, cornstarch, powder (you are free to carry this with you if you'd like, but I'd hesitate to spread it on the dance floor, for it generally makes serious dancers and club owners want to kill you!)

**Dance wax** - One need only think back to the Pet Rock to realize that anything can be sold to anyone who doesn't know any better. That hardly qualifies a product for endorsement. The need for dance floor wax usually is a result of wearing improper boots or shoes for dancing. I have watched in horror as people in tennis shoes or old worn out boots spread every form of "wax" on the floor to try to solve a problem that really doesn't exist. For some reason, many dancers don't seem to consider dance floors in the same category as basketball courts, and would be outraged to be forced to buy 'special' shoes for dancing. It's a shame. Dance shoes are light-weight and comfortable. They need extra care to keep the chrome suede sole effective but

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## How To Dress For Dancing

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they do smooth out the differences between floors in different states of repair and care. Dance floor "wax" is not a "wax" and is a hazard to anyone who wears proper footwear to dance in. Before spreading some foreign substance on a dance floor, consider that, in this age of lawsuits, it might be very costly to be found guilty of contributory negligence. When a dance teacher, competitor, or trained dancer hurts himself due to something being placed on the floor that does not "naturally" belong on the floor. The only question to be settled in an action like this is... "Who put it there, and with whose permission?" I personally stay off of floors that have been sabotaged like this. But then, I'm not into lawsuits. Don't risk your financial future betting that everyone comes from this point of view. It is easy to solve the problem without "dance floor wax." Wear proper footwear and you too can spin like a top and dance like you want to, without endangering others. I am a professional dance teacher, I teach dance, and I dance on all kinds of floors. I have watched people get sued for this very act. I have read insurance policies that prohibit the use of "floor wax" and I know first hand how dangerous this can be. Unfortunately, not everyone has had the opportunity to slip and fall on a dance floor. Just remember, not everyone wears street shoes for dance. If the floor is sticky, clean it instead of putting more junk on it. I encourage others who have had



Jefferson Community Ed Dance Class  
26th and Hennepin

bad experiences with foreign substances on the floor to help beginning dancers understand that the floor is not bad, it is the shoes. Most dance professionals do not prefer a fast floor or a slow floor, but would instead prefer a floor that reacts with the proper amount of speed and grab to allow PROPER footwear to adequately support the body in flight. The bottom line is that dance floor "wax" is dangerous and unnecessary. I have had to dance on grass, carpet, gym floors, etc. If you cannot dance without putting something on the floor, get some training. Ask yourself why don't we use silicone on the floor? Silicone is REALLY SLICK. Your dance floor "wax" is like silicone to anyone who knows how to move their own body.

## Personal Hygiene, Dehydration And Contagions

If you're going to spend so much time and energy learning to dance with other people, it doesn't make any sense to

At many local weekly dances, all the best dancers take over one corner of the room (like the "Rebels Corner" of the Swing clubs )

neglect your personal hygiene. Things like breath and, body odor, cleanliness of clothing, hands, fingernails, etc.

Drink a lot of water and dance like a camel. If you drink a lot of water before you go dancing, you may prolong your need to replenish your liquids. They say if you get thirsty, it is too late - you're dehydrated. I've shared this with a few friends, who have tried it and found it to be a success.

We're taught to cover our mouths when we sneeze, and usually we cover them with our hands, and if we're social dancing we'll then be joining those same hands with countless other people. Just something to be conscious of, now that flu season is upon us. After catching pneumonia, I've become much more careful at dances - particularly swing events where people sweat and exercise more - about washing hands frequently and not touching my own mucous membranes (mouth, eyes) in the interim.

## Dancing With Other People

"\*Dance with different people. Don't fall into a bad habit or develop bad technique." Dancing with many different partners helps. Besides practicing with your regular dance partners, go to some of the social dances that are available and mix. Everyone's lead and follow is different, and the variations help you to become a better dancer.

Dancing with someone more experienced might allow you to be more successful in trying something new or perfecting some styling. Once you learn how it feels, you can then do it with anybody. Dancing with someone less experienced than you is very

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## Dancing With Other People

good in determining if you have a good lead. This may even be more useful than dancing with someone more experienced. When you can get a less experienced dancer to successfully do a step she [has](#) never done before, you know you are doing well. If you dance only with one partner, you will never learn to lead/follow; you'll only learn to compensate for each other's bad habits.

At many local weekly dances, all the best dancers take over one corner of the room (like the "Rebels Corner" of the Swing clubs ) and the beginners tend to stay at the other end and dance with each other. You can see how it would be rather difficult to ask the good dancers to dance if they all hang out in a crowd and you have to barge in to even speak to them. So, make a special effort to get down to the beginners' end every so often and ask someone for a dance. Resist falling into a clique at your local



club: to outsiders, though you will be seen as the best dancers, you will also seem snobby and un-touchable.

Consider asking beginners: you were once one. Those experienced dancers who agreed to dance with you as a beginner gave you incentive (by "suffering" through with your learning) to keep going to reach a point of being a "decent dancer". Do the same for the beginners you meet and make them feel welcome - it is an investment in your future dance partners. Remember, as a beginner you don't know how perfectly right it feels for two people to dance as one until it happens to you for the first time.

### Floor craft

Floor craft does not primarily consist of modifying where your steps go to make sure that you don't hit or get hit.

Floor craft consists of two things:

avoiding or preventing "conflict" between you and others on the floor, and

1. Keeping the flow of your dance.

(1) Means you try not to get hit or hit. This can be attempted by manipulating your steps, but it is best dealt with by choosing your steps to deal with the traffic at hand. This implies that you have a lot of steps ready to apply. Well, yeah, unfortunately you have to go through a lot of practice, both on getting and perfect-

ing the steps so the leader does not have to think about them anymore, AND on applying them.

You can do things like overturn or under-turn a turn, hesitate, speed up (in very special cases), stop a step in mid-step or mid-turn and hold for 1 measure, skip out of someone's way, grab your partner and turn her around so you take the hit, or just plain duck the elbow coming at you. The best course however is to plan. Lots of social dancing helps with that. My competition floor craft became its best after six months of particularly heavy social dancing.

I think the bad reputation that International style (the "smooth" dances) has with social dancers is often justified because the International dancers so often do "routines", death on the social dance floor. Hey, a routine is also death on the competition dance floor!!! If a competitor can't depart from his routine, at least at the Open Amateur level, he shouldn't be out there!!!! Um, sorry about that, pet peeve. The International dancer has to be able to get out of the routine mode and be able to throw in whatever step is appropriate to the traffic.

(2) keeping the flow of your dance has to do with enjoying yourself. Floor craft is not only to prevent collisions but also so that your flow lets you move as you want to and so that you use

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## Floor craft

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the whole floor or as much of it as you want.

Floor craft: the ability to move where you want on the dance floor without interfering with others on the floor while retaining your own enjoyment.

Floor craft in competition: the ability to move where you want on the dance floor. (as many practice it. I try to follow the first definition always)

Tip for learning floor craft: don't do routines, and learn (and practice) enough steps to allow freedom.

## 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 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 comp 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. 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,

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# Teaching On The Dance Floor

practice later.

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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 her (him) 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



## Swing Clubs

East Meets West; 952-949-3016; 1st and 3rd Friday Dance at Dancesport in Hopkins 816 1/2 Main St.

Minnesota West Coast Swing; 651-731-9768; 2nd and 4th Friday Dance at B-Dale Club South of the Dale and Cty. B in St. Paul.

TC Rebels Swing club; Hotline number 952-941-0906; Dances are at Everett McClay VFW on frontage road of 494 by Mall of America.

When dancing West Coast Swing be sure to line your slot with the boards on the floor. If no boards then line up with length of room

Singles all Together has Ballroom lessons on Monday night 8 pm at the Lenox Center in St Louis Park.

Singles all Together West Coast Swing on Tuesday night 8 pm at Medina Ballroom.

TGIS dances will have free lessons 1 hour before Dance starting at 730 pm on the 1st and 3rd Saturday.

There will be 15 minutes of Beginner to get people started, Then 30 minutes of intermediate. Then 15 minute practice till dance starts.

So for all you singles that want to learn to dance while holding each other come on out.

## Dance Etiquette

Line of Dance is counter clockwise around the room for dances that move, like Foxtrot, and Waltz.



Larry and Barb will teach you to dance..

People who aren't moving like Rock and roll, Rumba, or Swing Dance in the middle of the room.

If you bump into someone, say sorry.

If you step on partner, say your sorry, then forget it. (Don't rag on it.)

Finish the song you started dancing to, before excusing yourself.

Don't do a step that requires kicking, on a crowded floor.

## Dance etiquette offenders

Bulldog: One who does step or kick, no matter who is in the way.

Chatter box: One who is always talking. (Social talk ok but not constantly)

Crooner: One who sings or hums with music.

Debater: One who talks politics or religion while dancing.

Iceberg: One with no smile ( At least look like your having fun.)

Jolly Extrovert: One who is cheerful with surrounding people, but forgets his own partner.

Quitter: Suddenly tired 1/2 way through song. (Finish Song)

Wrong way charlie: Clockwise traveler. (Against line of dance)

Larry L Ablin

Help at Singles All Together dance class on Monday nite, at Lenox center on Minnetonka Blvd in St Louis Park.

Teach at SAT West coast swing on Tuesday nite at Medina.

Teach at Jefferson Community Ed on Wednesday 26th and Hennepin

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Larry's corner can be read online at  
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