

# Larry's Corner

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<http://www.dancempls.com>

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.

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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

Congratulations to Dana Fasset. In case you haven't heard, she's the assistant manager at Rodeo in Cottage Grove, and may I say things have gotten cleaned up out there. Keep up the good work, stop in and say hello to her. Rodeo has ladies night on Wednesday night with a two step and line dance lesson. Also Saturdays Dana herself gives a

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great lesson.

Thursday night at Medina Ballroom Started a Country night. Dance starts at 7pm.

Remember dancing to country music you can also do East and West Coast swing, Waltz, Chacha, Rumba, and Foxtrot.

Hope to see all you country folks out on the dance floor.

## Nomenclature

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 actually saw a large group class once taught with the terms, "the person who dances the part danced by the man" and "the person who dances the part 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.

If any of this gets your sensibilities in an uproar, I'm sorry - partner dancing is politically incorrect anyway :-)

## The Importance Of Dancing With Beginners

While there is no question that dancing with a better partner will make you look good, and that with such a partner you can concentrate more on styling details and so on because the lead and follow doesn't need so much attention, it is not the best way to practice lead/follow skills. If learning leaders only dance with accomplished followers and vice-versa, they won't develop great leading /

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following skills, because they won't need to. Now let's suppose that you are a great leader or follower. What happens if you dance only with other great dancers? Your lead and follow skills will gradually deteriorate -- because you're not working them very hard. After some months without exposure to beginners, you may be surprised to find that you can't dance with them very well, even though they seem to do okay with other beginners.

You learn how to dance better by dancing with more experienced partners. But you learn how to lead/follow better by dancing with less experienced partners. Your skills are put much more to the test dancing with a beginner than with an experienced dancer. It is easy to lead/follow a great dancer. All your weaknesses as a leader/follower show up with beginners. Dance with them and ask yourself why each incorrectly led/followed figure didn't work and when you figure it out, work on incorporating the fixes into all your dancing!

You cannot become a good dancer by dancing only with the same person. Dancing only with each other, you will become good at dancing with each other with all the mistakes and bad habits that become "correct" for you.

There is a certain type of leader that one encounters again and again if one has been dancing for any length of time:

the guy who only wants to dance with the best followers because he believes they are the only partners who can match his high skill level. Often what is REALLY going on is that only the best followers can compensate for his mistakes or idiosyncrasies. They make him look good. But the guy continues to think he's the tops because he insulates himself from feedback. Dancing with poor to average followers is a good reality check. If none but the best can follow your leads, I respectfully suggest your leads could use some work. Also, that kind of thinking ultimately harms their dancing. I have seen guys overestimate their ability and abandon the study of technique FAR too soon. Consequently it will take them a lot longer to reach the next level of skill.

### **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, 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? Ouch! It's hard to smile when you're wearing a tourniquet...

### **Posture**

"Maintain good dance position, good posture and... remain grounded."

As for the bent forward posture used when dancing the Lindy Hop, Frankie Manning is on the video from "Can't Top the Lindy Hop" specifically describing how he made a conscious decision to bend over, to change the look and line of the dance, to set him apart from other dancers. Note that he was still thinking like a dancer and performer, aware of the lines of the body. It wasn't totally arbitrary; he knew the aesthetics. Arthur Murray and the ballroom crew disagree with that aesthetic, and impose a straight back. That's a choice... their preference. On the posture "controversy", Frankie Manning says "Straight can be okay. Stiff is wrong. I don't

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teach people to bend over or straighten up--I teach people to relax. I tell them to, anyway. You don't stoop over 'cause you're old, you straighten up 'cause you're old. I can't get over there like I used to!"

### The Ballroom Look In WCS

When swing dancers talk about the "ballroom look" as something negative, these are the kinds of things they mean:

Experienced WCS dancers keep the upper body straight, but the legs of the partners will form a "V" because they are leveraged. It's what some people call the "water skiing" look. On the anchor-step, experienced swing dancers will turn their torsos away from each other slightly, rather than squaring up to one another. Ballroom dancers without much swing experience tend to stand upright, so there is hardly any leverage between the partners.

Experienced swing dancers make their whips look sharp and linear (up and down the slot) whereas the typical ballroom dancer tends to have a more "rounded" look on whips (circling on a pivot point). This is most obvious on the continuous whip (aka "shuttle"). It's supposed to look like a series of whips, with a clean "freeze" at the end of each two counts, and with the man and woman moving toward and away from each other as well as around.

Altogether too many folks slur this to the point where it just

looks like two people walking around each other holding hands.

Experienced swing dancers tend to keep the elbows bent. The extended, long arms of ballroom-style Latin & international "jive" don't work for "street" swing & Latin. Dancing with ballroom trained WCS dancers can feel rather stilted since they keep emphasizing long, graceful lines rather than the "down and dirty" WCS style.

As done in the Swing community the end of patterns typically use an "anchor step" and not a "Coaster step." The follower is discouraged from moving forward under her own power at the end of the pattern. Instead, she hangs out until the guy remembers to lead.

Yet another distinction between the communities is in leverage and being grounded; the typical ballroom West Coast dancers are more "up", tending to stay too high, while in the swing community they dance low; more "into the floor." Similarly, in the ballroom circles there is little leverage while in the swing circles many dancers strive for leverage and connection that appears to be more "heavy."

Ballroom dancers tend to dance through the breaks in the music. Their syncopations tend to be just fancy steps, not interpretations of the music. They sometimes don't appear to notice swing rhythms and dance all their steps with straight

eighths, regardless of what the music is doing.

### Leading The Final Turn

Guys, when she's done with the spin, make a definite movement to end it, by bringing your hand, and hers back down to waist level. There are two ways for preventing the follower from turning more:

Extend your arm, and hopefully hers.

Or move her arm to a height where no turn is possible, i.e., chest height. If you lift her arm higher she can go into a turn or a neck wrap, lower and she can go into a wrap or hammer lock.

If your next step requires two hands, you should let your right hand make gentle contact with your partner's left arm, somewhere below the elbow, as she completes her turn. That will tell her that you want the attached hand.

# Dancing is a Hug with a walk

## 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. For November we will be learning East Coast Swing. 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.

Larry L Ablin  
Help's at Singles All Together dance class on Monday night, at Lenox center on Minnetonka Blvd in St Louis Park.

Teach at Singles All Together West coast swing on Tuesday night 8pm at Medina.

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

Phone: 952-891-9014 Email: dancempls@earthlink.net

## Dance Etiquette

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

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.

Lead foot: One who can't seem to lift one's feet from the floor.

Octopus: One who holds the partner everywhere but the correct dance position.

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

Sherman tank: The Leader leads her, but she isn't moving.

Truck driver: One who steers the partner like he drives.

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