

Larry's 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

Turning Speed And Timing

During a slow song, turn slowly. It is not necessary to whip around a turn during a slow song unless you're doing a multiple turn. Instead, let yourself flow through the turn. Don't force it." Followers, when you are hurrying you tend to disconnect from your partner because you start worrying about where you have to be two seconds in the future.

In doing a double turn coming out of a whip, one often begins the turn too early, on, say, the 5-count instead of waiting to anchor the right foot in place on the 6-count, then beginning the turn with feet very close together. A common mistake, is to swing that right foot out and back, hoping to help with the turn, but actually throwing oneself out of balance. And DON'T PANIC! It should be so easy!

A very common mistake is to rush the beginning of a spin or turn, thinking "this is going to be fast and difficult, I'd better start it early so I'll have enough time!" Trouble is that we and our partner may not be in the right places quite yet; if we were, the difficult move might be easier. It's far better to get where you're going, take the time to get "grounded" with your body weight properly over what will be the pivoting foot, and then start your turn. If you don't get all this right it'll be next to impossible to correct it during the turn; this is what leads to "falling out of a spin". A surprising hint is to think in terms of starting the turn later. e.g. if you're going to spin on 5&6, don't start it just after 4! Finish whatever you were

doing on 4, just as if you weren't going to spin, first. (syncopating as &3 4 rather than 3&4 gives you even more time to get there.)

Finish your spin before moving a foot away from this "spin position". If you anticipate the next "walk step", moving one foot away from the axis before your spin is done, your spin will be done right there, as you fall off the axis! And when you do step away from the "spin position", try to make it a small step, so that you won't *look* as if you're falling out of the spin. Regardless of how many spins the dancer does, he/she must be able to come out of it BALANCED, otherwise he/she won't be able to follow or lead properly; they'll just fall all over the place. Not only can you tell the difference when you're not balanced, your partner can too.

In most dances, including WCS, you want to finish your spin in time to have at least a very brief pause (1/8? ¼ beat maybe?) before you have to step away from the "spin foot position". If you don't have this brief moment I call this "settling time", it will look rushed. (this also is a distinction from Hustle styling -- Hustle looks better as the "settling time" gets shorter.) e.g. if you're spinning on 5&6, don't crowd the 1 too much. You almost want to give the impression that you had time to go around once more -- certainly that's better than giving the impression that you just barely had time, or even worse, didn't quite have time, to do what you did. (There are of course exceptions where a spin naturally flows into the next step, and in those cases you want it to look continuous, but these are obvious in context -- the above is a general rule, not an axiom.) A single spin done well, where you obviously are in control and had plenty of time before and after, ALWAYS looks better than a double spin that's obviously rushed. To help stop yourself from turning, think of spreading your toes out, not curling them in. Also "Tweeze" - Twist & Squeeze your thighs and feet together which gives you good leg tone and can help you stop cleanly.

Syncopating turns and such as 1 2&3 4 5&6. The reason is that the most important part of any spin is the stop. So the &3 gets you into whatever pivot or

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turn sooner, thus making the turn (and the lady doing the turn) look snappier. Then, the lady has a full beat to slow down, settle, and prepare for the next two beats (which she will subsequently snap out, then slow down and settle).

Really good styling in WCS calls for doing spins with "soft stops". i.e. you should think in terms of slowing to a stop, not stopping suddenly. In fact this is true of almost everything in WCS, especially in those places where you reverse direction. You should slow to a stop, have a brief pause, and then go on with the next thing; these reversals should usually not look sharp and abrupt. (This is one of the major errors made by WCS dancers who spent a lot of time doing Hustle before they learned WCS...) A perfect example is the "shuttle", aka "continuous whip". Many people think it looks better with sharp, abrupt stops, until they see a couple that does soft stops really well.

Corollary for guys leading the ladies in non-free spins: If she isn't comfortable going twice around in two counts, if she isn't COMPLETELY done with the second turn in time to have some "settling time", she'll feel rushed -- so don't keep pushing it. Most ladies like to be challenged a little bit during any given song, but hardly anyone likes to feel that they're constantly "not quite there". Be a sensitive leader. Adjust to the ability of your partner.

Hands

Hand position - some teachers preach the virtues of the cupped rather than flat hand on spins (indeed, on any kind of turns - even simple underarm passes or tuck turns). Reasons include:

- stronger connection between the partners; allows the follower to steady herself, if necessary, to keep her balance;

- makes it easier for the leader to indicate multiple spins;

- after the spin (or simple turn), the lead/follow hands end up in the proper position for the next pattern (which can be anything).

If the follower allows her hand to go flat during a spin/turn, the connection is weakened, and the lead/follow hands end up reversed (so the next pattern has to be something like an underarm pass to get the hands back to the proper position).

In ECS a flat palm allows the follower to easily choose:

- single or multiple spins (note that a good ECS follower can do two spins in 2 counts in slow-to-mid-speed music)

- to do something besides a regular spin (like a reverse spin, its nice to watch)

Also, it allows the leader to more easily change hands while the spin is in process. I do several moves where this is necessary. Its also worthwhile to note that in ECS a reversed hand position is OK, and is actually the basis for several moves (a jive reverse, an arm wrap, others).

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. 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!

There are two hand signals for an outside turn;

- changing pressure on the shoulder blade with the man's right hand, AND

- rotating the man's left hand within the lady's right hand so that the man's fingers lie horizontally along the lady's palm, pointing to the man's right.

The rotated hand is preparatory to a rise to a pivot point above the lady's head. Individually, the "back pressure" signal may just be a steering move to avoid a traffic jam, just as the wiggle of the man's left hand may be an attempt at a frame adjustment. The man's left hand rotation is more visible than a pre-lead alone without it, but for social dancing I would prefer a clear (double) signal to a poor or missed

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signal. The combination of the two signals indicate a prep-lead, and, as the two people practice dancing together more (IF they do), the signals become more subtle and therefore less visible. Prep leads taught and used this way work well for two-steppers early in their dance career, because the signals are clear.

Ladies - which hand do you present for the man to catch on free spins? The right hand is the WCS hand and the left hand is the Hustle hand for lady's free turns.

Most leaders are taught, in their beginning classes, to keep their lead hand just above the follower's forehead in a spin. This is correct, but in addition leaders should be aware of how their hand gets there. They should take the shortest line between two points, not an arc through the air. Can be demonstrated by putting an object on her head with a natural vertical movement, versus an exaggerated curve through space.

Most dance instructors use the terms "stirring" or "cranking", and tell leaders not to do it (i.e., cranking women makes them cranky") however, most every dancer has a different idea of what constitutes stirring or cranking. If you stand in front of a mirror and lift your right arm (I said ARM, not ARM AND SHOULDER!) so that your upper arm is parallel to the ground (keep that shoulder DOWN!), and you bend your elbow so that your forearm is vertical, you will see that your fingers clear the top of your head by an inch or so. Now if you place your weight on the ball of one foot, and someone comes over and applies a force to your hand and causes you to turn WITHOUT YOUR HELP IN ANY WAY (i.e., they grab your hand and walk in a circle around you), THAT is cranking. You will feel very off balance, and your turn will have a start-stop jerkiness to it.

You will notice that when you turn in place with your right arm in the position just described, your right hand describes a circle above your head, like an angel's "halo". It is the leader's job to keep the woman's hand tracing this halo during her turn. This can be done without raising the follower's upper arm above a horizontal position by proper control of the leader's arm and wrist.

(Find a phonograph turntable, position your wrist above the spindle, put your fingertips on the table and spin the table, keeping your fingers in the same spot as the table goes around. That approximates the wrist action. First get good at it with either hand, in either direction, then work on the timing.) Note that the leader's arm should not clear the follower's head by any more than 2 inches. Note for the followers: Do not push the leader's arm upward by raising your hand while turning under his arm, and your body and arm must turn together as one - do not let your elbow get behind your body, or cross in front of your chest. Keeping your raised hand within your peripheral vision during turns will ensure that you turn your body properly and will prevent injury to arm or shoulder.

Rather than a vertical forearm (which was only used for demonstration purposes earlier - if a leader has to make a large circular motion with his/her arm, he has to stretch and practically lean over her to do so and he runs the risk of throwing the lady off balance), the follower's forearm should be angled towards the head, thus decreasing the radius of the "halo" - almost as if she is "saluting" (keep that shoulder DOWN!) - it's a very tight circle. It should not be held directly over the follower's head. This latter method is taught in beginner classes where followers are instructed to turn whenever their arms are simply lifted. (if the ladies arm is raised, that is usually a lead for something... but hopefully, she will have other clues as to when to turn, like pressure on the opposite shoulder. - note that in swing an arm raised without a turn happens when the leader drapes the ladies arm over his head onto his shoulder.) If the man just raises the lady's arm without giving her the proper lead for a turn, just stand there like the Statue of Liberty. Note that you cannot put your hand directly over your head if your upper arm is at the desired horizontal position. With VERY BEGINNING followers it may be necessary to stir or crank - at first. When dancing with someone who is at this stage, try to reduce the diameter of the "halo" with each successive turn. There is an "On-ramp" to get to the halo, and an equally important "Off-ramp" to get back down.

Leaders, do not lift your arm high! It only needs to be lifted slightly (2 inches at most) above the followers head. Lifting the arm high completely alters a followers balance. Reverse roles for a minute and try it. Followers, do not push up with your hand during a turn. Keep it quiet near your head and use the leader's hand for gaging turning speed - leaders, you must turn her smoothly and on time! Keeping the hands only 2 inches at most above the followers head is at least 50 percent the follower's job. She must keep her arm" toned. The only time the leader should raise the follower's hand high is if he wants to keep her from traveling in a turn, like when the man wants to go under himself.

For guys leading spins, the main thing is to be aware of and then avoid what can make a spin go wrong!

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When first starting out, it is better to hold her hand centered just above the top of her head than off center. When holding it off-center it is easy to pull her off center, until you become very, very, VERY practiced at leading spins by moving your hand around the "halo" with hers. Holding the hand up too high encourages the lady to raise her center of gravity -- the exact opposite of what she wants. The lower your c.g., the better your spin.

In initiating turns from closed dance position, I've come across several schools of thought on whether the lead is through the man's left arm, or through his right arm to her shoulder-blade.

One extreme being that you lead turns with the left arm, with no mention of the right arm being made at all (This is possible if the lady maintains good frame through her arm, and keeps her wrist straight, though this is NOT recommended. If she has a limp arm - then the opposite shoulder lead is essential)

The other extreme is that the lead comes from the right hand with a double turn being indicated by a stronger lead. I find leading doubles with a stronger right arm works fine in swing but not as well in C&W 2-step, where the double takes 4 beats. Here I resort to the left arm lead for the 2nd half of the turn but I initiate the turn mostly with my right arm.

Remember gentlemen, the turn is led with the right hand, not the left" I've always heard that the turn comes from the pressure on the lady's shoulder blade, while the man's left hand maintains position to indicate where the turn goes. Forcing the man's left hand forward after the lady's hand is above her armpit is a good way to injure her.

If the man just raises the lady's arm without giving her the proper lead for a turn, she should just stand there like the Statue of Liberty.

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We started a new Web site Bulletin Board, Photos and stories for Dancing.

If you have questions about dancing, learned a new dance step, have dance clothes or shoes you are not using and want to sell, or need you can use the Bulletin board.

If you want to see photos of Minneapolis, MN dancers, you can go to the Photo Gallery.

If you want to read dance storys they are under Headlines.

Larry L Ablin Email: lablin@earthlink.net Phone: 952-898-3513

Barb Johnson Email: westcoast65@earthlink.net

Teach Beginners at Singles All Together dance class on Monday night, at Lenox center on Minnetonka Blvd in St Louis Park.

Teach at Singles All Together on Tuesday night 8pm at Medina. Starting Nightclub 2 step 6/1/2004

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

Lakeville Class Century Junior High 952-985-4610

Prior lake class Grainwood Elementary 952-440-2930

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