

Larry's Corner

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Aol

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

Ducks And Neck Wraps

There are three kinds of Ducks - shoulder, armpit, and waist. The level of the man's hand on the woman's body is the level of the duck for the woman. Ladies - wait until the last possible instant to do the duck, then snap your head back up quickly. Men - stop her rotation in CCW shoulder ducks using your fingers - let her shoulder rotate right into your hooked fingers.

A shoulder roll should be a TOTALLY lead able step (the guys hand is all the way across her back and his fingers are in her armpit) However, I will admit that for safety's sake, the leader should always call the NUMBER of rolls we're going to do. It's not the entry that has a bad lead, it's the exit. The woman coming up with the man trying to lead one more can be disastrous, as can the man trying to catch the woman to stop her while her head's still down.

Also, "One", "Two", "Three" and "Four" are much more easily understood in a noisy club than "Shoulder rolls!"

The following series of steps is presented here because it incorporates a number of advanced lead/follow/turning techniques.

An "illusion" is common accent for WCS, done when spinning the lady into a wrap. For a neck wrap, instead of stopping the lady when she reaches the wrap, the spin is continued for one more revolution. The lady ducks her head, goes under the arms one

more time, and then returns her head to 'normal.' Done in a spin, it has a very nice effect - turning doubles into triples. The 'illusion' is that the lady has spun one too many times. If she ducks under quickly enough it is difficult for the casual observer to tell how she accomplished the extra spin, as opposed to being 'all wrapped up.' It is essentially a duck out of a neck wrap except that the duck is done on a continuation of the turn that got her into the neck wrap in the first place. The whole idea of the duck after the neck wrap is to keep hold of her right hand that is neck wrapped while she does the extra turn. A word of caution, this duck isn't 100% lead able, you can help by raising your hand slightly, but if she doesn't duck it can look pretty weird and could possibly hurt (she ends up with her face in the crook her elbow, so it most likely will just look weird, but it's so weird you'll never convince anybody you meant to do it). While the move is lead able - I've never had anyone follow it correctly on the first try. Most ladies try to keep their heads up, or they try to force their hands up and over their head (why?). Generally after a little instruction about what I am expecting, and showing them what the lead feels like they will begin to follow this move without any problems. I generally don't raise my hand or arm. Instead I keep them at the level of the ladies shoulders, with my forearm parallel to the floor. I find that if my arm suddenly goes up as their head goes down it tends to knock the lady off balance in her spin.

You can also do an illusion in a different way. Make sure that you quite emphatically put her hand wherever you want it to be in the end, and then let her hand slip out of yours, and catch it again after the extra turn. (The better followers understand this, and don't retract the hand after you let go.) I do this quite regularly, leading women into a tuck with a double spin to hammerlock. Here you keep hold of the ladies' right hand, allow her to do an extra turn by letting go of her left, and then pick up her left hand to go into the hammerlock the 2nd time around. (After a few tries I once had a rather petite woman (who spins like crazy) do, instead of a single/double (full left turn to tuck, one-and-a-half right turn out) a double/triple (so to speak) using such slip-through turns. And all in six counts ...) The ordinary single/double starts from an open two-hand hold, then

Inside this issue:

Ducks And Neck Wraps	1
Playing & Feeling The Music	2
Learning To Lead More Figures	3

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

into a single lady's left turn into a wrap and then a double right turn into a hammerlock. The wrap stops her turn, and from there it's not too difficult to change directions.

The accent can be done as a 'body illusion' if the lady is spinning into a 'sweetheart' or 'waist' wrap. The wrap is placed higher than normal - the joined hands are up at the ladies arm pit instead of being at her waist level. When the lady would normally wrap into the 'waist', the lead causes her to duck under, bending her head and shoulders down. The lady then does an extra spin as in the 'neck illusion.'

This can be demonstrated this while you experiment with tuck-turns; you can bring your partner into a hammerlock by keeping hold of her left hand out of a tuck-turn. It's real simple and looks real good. I've seen this tuck to hammerlock - followed by a 'single/double' down the slot to the lady's neck. Then it was a 6 count basket out of this wrap. Pretty impressive!

- You begin with the lady facing you in a hammerlock, mans right hand to lady's left hand in a hammerlock behind her back, and lady's right hand in mans left, you are facing each other.

- On 1,2 get out of the slot to your right, leading the lady forward.

- On 3&4, lead the lady into a single inside (left) turn, do not take either hand over her head. Take your footwork beside the lady as a side, cross (or close), side. Lead the turn with your right forearm across her tummy, *let go* of this hand - this is the key to the pattern. Your left hand will go to the front of the lady's right shoulder, as she is turning. Your left arm will end up diagonally across her upper back, palm out, hand over her right shoulder, still holding her right hand. The turn is stopped with pressure from your left forearm on her back. It is important that your left hand is on top of her right shoulder - this makes the next lead easier.

- On 5&6 the turn is reversed (right hand turn). The lead comes from your left forearm across her back. Do not take the hand over the lady's head. Your left hand will stay near her neck. She will unwrap, then wrap into her neck.

You should pick up her left hand with your right after she is facing you. The lady does 1.5 turns. Take your footwork back into the slot. You should be in front of the lady, with your left hand around her neck, and having picked up her left hand in your right hand. I will usually trail the back of my right hand at the ladies waist as she does the 'double' on 5&6. It helps regulate how far she will travel down the slot during the spin. That is also

my indication to her that I want to pick up her hand when that spin is finished.

Playing & Feeling The Music

You are the **VISIBLE** part of the Music.

Feeling the music and playing with the music are two sides of the same coin. In West Coast Swing, there are several levels of awareness, so let's explore them one at a time.

BASIC TIMING: Feeling the music at a basic level involves listening to the sets of 8 beats of music that exist in all swing music. You will start to hear 2 beat increments of one Down-Beat, followed by one Up-Beat. Being able to connect your center (CPB) to the beat of the music, puts you **ON-TIME**.

PULSING: ACCENTING each Up-Beat, as you dance, immediately makes you feel something a little different. This rhythmic recurring accent is called Pulsing the Up-Beat. Pulsing The Up-Beat connects you to the music.

PHRASING: Listen to the number of sets of 8, you are soon able to identify the end of the Phrases, the same way that you identify the end of a paragraph when you are reading. The next step is being able to start a **NEW PATTERN** at the beginning of the next phrase. This is a stage of development and is understood in it's own time. Don't push the development.

At this stage, one learns to extend a 6 beat pattern to 8 when the need arises. One learns to syncopate the anchor steps in a way that does not interfere with the partnership.

BREAKS: Listening carefully to the Music, and counting out the 8's as above, you will begin to hear little Breaks in the music that require a different accent - stop or Rhythm Break that makes you feel closer to the music. This is the point at which you understand that **SYNCOPTIONS** are supposed to be used to interpret the music - or to counter the music.

Syncopations should not be dances just because you know how. they should be placed carefully, skillfully, to interpret the music, to **ADD** to the performance.

This is also the level where **SHE** can feel when she will be allowed to take liberties with the lead and extend her syncopations if they **FIT THE MUSIC**. It is also a point when the **MAN** discovers that he gets credit for the move, when she hears something in the music and is **ALLOWED** to interpret what she hears.

Finally, **YOU ARE THE MUSIC:** This is the point where **YOU** are the instrument in the beat. The rhythm is very 1 & 2 & 3 & 4, but you add your own pulse with &a1 &a2 &a3 &a4. You will not only **LOOK** better, but it will actually **FEEL** more exciting. The music could even have a silent break while you do a syncopation. There is a point in your development where **YOU**

(Continued from page 2)

become the **VISIBLE** part of the music. Excitement comes from having someone **SEE** something happen at the same time that they **HEAR** something happen in the music.

CHALLENGE or **ECHO**: This level of playing to the music involves the level of both dancers. It usually takes place on a set of 8 where the man (usually) dances a 4 beat rhythm break or syncopation and she counters with something that either matches or exceeds. It is a game of playing with the music. This was a popular sport in the '50's, no doubt brought on by the popularity of challenge in the Cha Cha. This is a form that will surface from time to time, even if it was not being taught.

This form of play is much the same as carrying on a conversation with someone new. You don't carry on a conversation about nuclear physics unless you know that your partner understands nuclear physics. **BOTH** partners must stay aware of the level of understanding of the other partner.

Learning To Lead More Figures

The number of steps you know is not important. Execution is everything. Good ballroom dancers create the illusion of effortless dancing. Most new dancers don't realize that it is an illusion and that their first efforts at ballroom dance look horrible and feel horrible to their more experienced partners. 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. You can't help but say to yourself, "This must be it! This must be the great experience I've heard people talk about!". Dancing is much more about moving in perfect harmony with your partner than it is about moving through a specific patterns of steps. When I get the opportunity to dance with an excellent partner I get my enjoyment out of the way we effortlessly "float" together across the dance floor (mostly doing basic steps) rather than out of the fact that she can follow some obscure steps of mine. I also much rather hear a lady compliment me on being smooth than her being dazzled by my step vocabulary.

Ballroom dancing requires complex and non-trivial skills. Given a limited amount of time one can learn a lot of steps poorly or a few steps well. To learn just 1 step at a national championship level could easily take more than a 100 hours of training, given a talented student and starting from scratch.

Each pattern in the syllabus shows a technique that is critical. Bronze 'steps' cover: dance position, moving forward (progressive basic), promenade, side (side basic), changing directions (box basic, ad lib), dancing outside partner (Park Avenue or Junior),

turns, pivots, timing (running step). Also footwork, partnership, lead-follow, timing, expression.

I appreciate bronze much more now that I dance silver (and up). In silver, I quickly realized that we had not covered moving backward, fall away, pivots, CMBP, outside partner, shaping, control, light leading, body lead and many other things. Every silver movement brings up a technique which is anchored in basic bronze technique.

Each time I've progressed a level, my dancing has changed significantly enough that I had to go back and review (re-learn) prior material in order to apply the new level. Most significant are: balance, coordination, frame, control, and center.

Let's try a course plan, realizing that group classes don't usually work enough on style, footwork, partnership or expression: With ~10 steps in 10 dances to master the bronze syllabus, it would take some number of hours just to see the patterns, practice and perfect them (100hrs @ 1 hr per pattern). Add style, rhythm, timing and execution for 10 dances (40hrs @ 4 hrs per dance). Footwork, grounding, centering, legs for smooth/Latin (30 hours).

Partnership, position, posture, frame, lead/follow, floor craft (20 hours). Expression, arm styling (10 hours) Manners, courtesy, shyness, experience: (50 non class hours) Your teachers could probably show you all the silver and bronze patterns that they normally teach in a dozen hours or so. You would look pitifully bad doing most of them. At \$45/hour the above would cost you \$540. You could get yourself a copy of 'Modern ballroom dancing' by Victor Sylvester (around \$20) and just memorize hundreds of patterns therein, complete with foot charts. You will still look pitifully bad, but at a much lower cost! Be sure your partner memorizes them too, because you won't be leading them!

About 80% of the silver and bronze patterns are of about the same difficulty. In fact, apart from the most basic steps (e.g., box), everything else is hard. Come to think of it, even the box step is hard. Come to think of it, even walking forward is hard. Come to think of it, just standing in dance position is hard. Ninety-five per cent of the time, you can spot the good dancers long before they start moving.

Good dancing is hard. If you are trying to do it well, that is. If you learn some of the patterns, you might as well learn them all. If you have learned some of them badly, you will probably learn all of them badly. Then you will then have more ways of looking bad and less time to learn to look good.

Hours aren't everything. Quality counts, that's why you get more from a private lesson, and more from a great instructor. Experience also counts. Ballroom dancing also well requires a certain amount of body awareness (kinesthesia) and muscle strength, which

(Continued from page 3)

most people develop over time (although top competitors actually train like athletes.) Learning to dance well takes time. I have danced with new 'instructors' who took the 'crash course' and no doubt put in lots of hours in 3 months and qualify to teach the syllabus. However, they can't dance. The body just can't absorb the material. I have also danced with long time instructors who can't dance. They have lots of hours on the floor, they just plateau and stop working at it.

I've been teaching for over 25 years. I have trained many teachers and students. Some that I have worked with have taken up to 7 hour per variation. You are only as good as your basics. World class dancers practice walking around a room together in dance hold. In American style the only reason I teach bronze is to give the student a chance to learn partner shipping how to lead & follow. Silver level isn't any harder to dance once you have learned partner shipping. But it is tough if you have not. The box is not an easy step to do right in any dance. Silver flows better. You may be ready for silver. Ask

Come Dance With Us

[Http://www.comedancewithus.com](http://www.comedancewithus.com)

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.

yourself:

Does the lady feel part of you when dancing or an extension of your own body?

Do you let her follow rather than make her follow?

Do you roll the lady into promenade position?

Do you push from the opposite foot on all traveling steps?

Are your toes always pointing in the same direction?

Do you know when to use CBMP, Shoulder Lead, Sway?

When I was training teachers in bronze Waltz and Foxtrot I told them they passed the bronze when they could go through it with their hands behind their backs. A really good Bronze dancer is better than a not-so-good Silver dancer. After 25 years I still go over my Bronze steps even if I do not use them often on the dance floor. It makes my silver and gold variations only better.

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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

Web <http://www.dancempls.com> for where to dance in Minneapolis, MN

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