



# 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.

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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 News-letters

## Getting A Swelled Head

As soon you have progressed beyond the stage of outright beginner, people are constantly telling you how good you are. Mostly, this is just meaningless. Out of tact, politeness or whatever people will very rarely tell you that your dancing totally sucks even when it does. Your friends will flatter you to make you feel good. Your instructors will say "that's good" to encourage you and build your confidence. People who know nothing about dancing will gush about how well you dance. Nobody will say "I'd be really embarrassed if I danced like you" or "that's really mediocre dancing". Further, even if people wanted to let us know exactly how well or badly we were dancing, they wouldn't have the vocabulary. Mostly, all they can say are things like "that's not bad".

## THE TOP TEN SIGNS YOU DIDN'T DO AS WELL AS YOU THOUGHT IN THE LAST JACK AND JILL CONTEST

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10. The shoe lady discontinues the style of shoe you dance in.

9. The person who promised to compete with you is standing on a nearby freeway playing chicken with the semi's.

8. The very worst dancer in the world says you were the only contestant on the beat.

7. The maintenance crew has to repair the floor where you danced.

6. Your partner's spouse gives you a hug and kisses you on both cheeks.

5. Forty minutes have passed and your partner still hasn't come out of the bathroom.

4. You wonder if the noise coming from the judges' area is snoring.

3. After you dance, people point and laugh at whoever is standing behind you; BUT, when you turn around, there's no one there.

2. You would have preferred dancing to "Baby Work Out" and then learned that you did.

And the number one reason:

1. Pieces of your partner's dress are still in your hand.

There is more than one "right" way to dance, but "There are very few dancers that have a "style." Most dancers have several learned techniques. 99.9 percent of all other danc-

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ers only have good and bad techniques. (Another sad reality is that anything done by a top competitor becomes, "correct" style. There were several examples of this at one U.S. Open -- routines that were very well done for what they were, but which were apparently choreographed with little or no attention to swing styling. But if you're a top competitor already you can get away with that, and win with it, because no one dares say you nay.) When you do something that you think is cool, but someone else says that it is not, do not use the excuse, "it's just my style," because it is probably just bad technique. Knowing that you can improve and can accept criticism is the first and best step towards becoming a better dancer and developing sound technique."

## **Dance Frame**

When taking a closed position hold you need to have balance and a stable frame. A good hold must allow each partner to stay balanced and not interfere with movement down the floor - Leaders, don't hold the lady like you are a vise - a good hold must have some toned flex/give to allow adjustment inside the hold. Especially in turns is it necessary for both partners to stay on their left side and not to interfere with their partner's movement. In a good hold every partner has his/her own territory. If you enter your partners territory you risk war (or at least crushed toes)!

Most dancers have gone through a spaghetti phase, followed by a stiff-as-a-board phase before realizing what the proper toned frame feels like. The dance frame is the foundation of your dancing - "If the foundation is weak, the house will collapse" Don't be a "busy body" - a quiet body allows woman to distinguish leads, and looks much better. A stable frame is important because it maximizes the couple's signal-to-noise ratio - maximizes the amount of useful information that can be transmitted between their bodies. When the

man leads, he prefaces all his steps with his momentum; for example, if he plans to step left on count 1, he puts his body weight a tiny bit leftward, a tiny fraction of a second before count 1. In this way, he tells the woman where to step next, so that she can step as much with him as possible. But if either of the partners has a soft, spaghetti-like frame, the man's momentum can't be transmitted to the woman, because there's no conduit - no solid connection between their bodies - for the information to travel along. In other words, the connection between them is so noisy that the signal gets lost. Try this exercise: dancing either rumba or mambo, randomly switch between basics and cucarachas. Just before you switch, put your weight in the direction you're about to travel, almost enough to fall over. (No, in real dancing you don't put so much weight into it; this is just an illustration.) Can you see how your partner would feel that? That's what I'm talking about, only subtler. On the other hand, it's also bad to have too firm a frame, because then you either can't lead properly or can't react properly and you will always be throwing yourself and your partner off balance because there is no give to it - and you'll look like a mechanical robot. For example, if your firm frame extends all the way down your torso, you'll have a very difficult time stepping outside partner, because you're trying to keep not only your shoulders but also your navels parallel. Frame is defined as "the minimum tone required to achieve position and maintain it."

How are you to lead or read a lead without a good frame? When a leader moves your hand, he isn't just moving your hand, but he is moving all of you. If we don't maintain a good frame, body leads won't work either.

I found that I achieved a better sense of dance frame by practicing while holding a light card chair. It forced me retain a dance frame, not twist, collapse, drop an arm, or shape out of alignment. It also gave me a feeling of moving in-line with a partner. I used the chair mostly for problems that I

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was having with Rumba and Waltz. For Swing (no, I don't recommend that you try open moves holding a chair in one hand, but) this technique might help with closed moves such as back-spot turns and Lindys (whips).

What we usually think of as good "styling" is really a matter of good "technique". If we follow a few simple technique rules, we will automatically look like we have good styling. The number one rule, for both leaders and followers, being: Never break your frame!! That is, never let any part of your arm get behind your shoulder, whether you are in closed or open position. For example, say you are progressing down the line of dance and want to extend your free arm back from the line of dance as a styling gesture at some break point. We are usually taught in beginning classes to progress facing down the line of dance. So what most people end up doing is keeping their body facing forward down the line of dance and extending their hand back behind them. This however breaks the frame and doesn't look good. However, if while your feet are facing forward, you turn your upper body to the side, then you can hit the same arm pose by just extending your arm to the side. In this case your frame is not broken, it looks good, and you are facing the audience which also makes for good presentation. A good way to keep from breaking your frame was for the leader to always keep his belt buckle facing the follower and to do what ever it took in foot work to accomplish this.



I was taught that (and this may depend on the style of dance and the particular move being done) the thing to do is to always keep the navels of the leader and the follower pointing to each other where possible. In a WCS under arm pass, the leader should turn his body as the follower passes by so that his body is always facing hers.

#### Closed Dance Position:

Followers, don't keep your left hand all the way around your partner's shoulder blade, where any backward motion on his part could throw you off-balance. Another problem with keeping your hand around the shoulder blade is that it's pretty much impossible for your partner to get you into a right turn, leading with his right hand only. Now, he needs to crank you around (break that grip you have on him) with his left hand. This makes stuff like simultaneous right turns impossible. (E.g., in WCS do a tuck turn, led only with the right hand, and both partners do a right

spin out.) Plus the arm around your partner's shoulder makes it look like the lady is hanging on her partner. The follower should keep her left hand on the "front" side of the shoulder/upper arm joint, as it allows for a wider variety of alternatives. An even better example is when you start a whip, release the left hand on 4 normal fifth step, then on six you snake your up off the right shoulder so you can do an elbow catch to stop and reverse the followers spin. If the follower has the hook in you, you'd better do it real gentle like and be prepared to abort the move. When the follower first puts a hook like that on me, I might mention it in passing. If it comes back later, I'll attempt the elbow catch whip to illustrate just why it is so im-

portant not to hook. That usually fixes it for the rest of the dance because the follower realizes how easy it is to accidentally wind up with a hurt arm.

"Leaders, watch where your hand is on the followers back, especially during 8-count whips. Do not put your hand low on her back, it is painful after a few swing outs. Place your hand in the center of the follower's back between the shoulder blades and maintain proper ballroom dance position. Create a form fitting dance space between you and your partner by combining hand placement, arm tension and posture. You will immediately notice a tremendous increase in momentum if you dance this way. This will provide you with the ability to do 8-count whips more efficiently to faster music. And women, don't forget to really travel out on the swing out. It is at least 50% your responsibility to get out there quickly so the next figure can be executed effortlessly."

### **Come Dance With Us**

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Or <http://www.dancempls.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.

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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.

Teach Ballroom at Jefferson Community Ed on Wednesday 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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