

Could Dance Position Help? **By Barbara and Jim German**

Dance position - it says it all or does it? How many times has a difficulty with a figure been attributed to an error in dance position? Well, what is dance position and how does it help us?

In its simplest form, dance position is the relationship of man and woman to each other. When we took our first lesson we were introduced to the starting dance position. Basically, the man and the lady were facing each other with the man's right arm around the lady with his right hand on the lady's shoulder blade and the lady's left was lightly placed on the man's right arm with her hand near his upper arm. The man's left hand and lady's right hand were joined and the arms were bent to form a type of triangle, which balanced the couple. The joined hands were between the two people and not more toward the man or lady. The lady was also offset slightly to the man's right side allowing the lady's left foot to be outside of the man in his right side. The man's right foot was between the lady's feet. Continuing, the lady's right foot was between the man's feet and the man's left foot was outside of the lady on his left side. This position was called dance position and we spent time becoming familiar with moving forward, backward, and sideways in this position. The purpose was to become comfortable with dance position and also to see how the man could communicate a lead and the lady could respond or follow his movement.

Little did we know how important this would become. Dance position is both the starting position and the position the lady would be returning to when a figure took her out of this position. Remember doing side closes left and right trying to stay in good dance position? Remember when moving left, the man raised his left hand along with the lady's hand to signal or lead the lady in turning under the man's arm? As the lady turned under the arch, she returned to the starting dance position. Remember when both turned slightly leftwards to semi-closed position and continued with a through, face, close to end in dance position? The concept being taught and practiced involved starting in dance position, executing a figure and returning to dance position. This concept was important when we started learning to dance and is just as important now when we know many figures at several phase levels. But are we paying as much attention to our dance position now when learning new material as we did in the beginning?

On a man lead and lady follow concept, the man will lead a figure taking the lady out of dance position, the lady follows his lead and returns to dance position unless another lead is presented. For example, in the underarm turn, the man raises his left hand as a lead for the lady. The lady will follow the lead and return to dance position. As the lady returns to danced position, the man moves his left hand to the right side of his body indicating a lead for the lady to walk around him (i.e. Lariat). The lady will see the man has not returned his left hand to a normal dance position. Instead he is indicating she should follow another lead. The lady will follow this lead and return to dance position (unless a further lead is presented).

Not all leads are hand leads. Some figures will end the couple out of dance position. For example, the telemark is a figure ending the couple in semi-closed position with the next figure allowing the lady to return to dance position (i.e. through, face, and close). The man could follow the telemark with a figure ending in Banjo position and continue with another figure to end in dance position (i.e. telemark, feather finish, and three step). Even in the double reverse, the lady is returning to dance position although her feet will be crossed. Think of some words that suggest returning to dance position. For example: maneuver, slip, face, etc. Think of some figures that suggest returning to dance position. For example: reverse turn half, half-natural turn, double reverse spin, rope spin, slow side lock etc.

Let's apply this knowledge to a dance. Take a dance you enjoy and execute the routine one figure at a time. Check at the end of each figure to see if you are in the requested position. And, if the figure returns you to dance position, are you in good dance position. Now take a section of a dance, which is causing some difficulty, and execute one figure at a time. Check at the completion of each figure to verify your position is correct - not close but correct - before starting the next figure. Many times this exercise will identify the difficulty and by resolving it you and your partner will enjoy the dance and each other more.

See you on the dance floor.