



Dancing Is Not Walking

by Harold & Meredith Sears

Do you ever feel that you are just walking through your dance patterns -- a little plodding, less than smoothly artistic? Two strategies to make your movements feel more like dancing

are anticipation/preparation and rise/fall.

In our classes, we are taught the individual steps that make up a figure and the individual figures that make up a routine. As we dance, the cuer names those steps and figures in order -- Open Telemark; Maneuver Side Close; Back Passing Change; Back Waltz . . . But we must not think in terms of individual components. Instead of dancing this and then that, individually, we need to dance this *into* that, flowing continuously.

In our usual walking steps, we accelerate a little as we push with one foot and we decelerate as we land on the next foot -- go, stop, go, stop. Walking has a regular up-and-down motion to it, too, as we push off (and up a little), swing a leg forward to catch ourselves, and then land on that foot -- up, down, up, down. When we dance, we don't want the "go, stop" or the "up, down." We want our bodies to move across the floor at a smooth rate, as if we were gliding on ice skates. Our feet may be scooting about beneath us, but our bodies should be floating in a dignified and stately way above it all. To do this, instead of launching the body forward and then taking the step and catching our weight, we want to reach out with the foot first, begin to transfer weight, contact the floor, and only then fully transfer weight.

Similarly, we must not see the end of a figure as a goal -- "If I can only get to the end of this Double





Telespin!" We must look beyond that last step, prepare for it in terms of position and alignment, and so maintain the smooth flow. Consider the Open Telemark. If you only think of the individual steps in this figure, you will likely take the third step with a little jerk of arrival. The Open Telemark *is* a discrete figure, but it is only a small part of the dance, so don't feel that you have arrived or finished anything. If a Maneuver is coming up, begin a little right-face body rotation on the last step of the Telemark. Don't wait for the first step of the Maneuver. Get that trail foot moving, push off and continue the body flow.

Second, dancing should not be flatfooted, level locomotion around the floor. There *are* rhythms that are mostly flat, without much rise and fall, but much of our favorite dancing -- waltz, foxtrot, bolero -- includes conspicuous up and down. The "dancing river" not only flows counter-clockwise around the hall; it also crests and breaks in smooth and regular wave-like patterns.

The general rule is that you lower at the end of one measure and into the beginning of the next. Soften the supporting knee (bend it a little) and at least touch the heel to the floor. Lowering accomplishes two things. It allows you to reach out farther with the free foot, without bumping into your partner. She feels the lowering and is ready to step back before you really start to progress. Then from the lowered position, your first step will be longer, smoother, and more gliding. From an up position, it is more short and abrupt. Of course, the second thing that lowering does is to set you up for graceful rise to the crest of the next wave. In your up position, your knees are extended but not locked, you are erect and stretched in your torso -- lungs full perhaps and back a bit arched, head up -- and your weight is on the balls of your feet. Here, you are poised for action, ready to move this way or that, ready to turn easily, ready to respond and so dance with your partner. If you stay flatfooted, you are rooted and heavy.