

Lead and Follow in the Swing Rhythms

by Harold & Meredith Sears

Some of the Swing rhythms that we enjoy are Jive, East Coast Swing, West Coast Swing, and sometimes Lindy and Hustle. Jive has the

fastest tempo, at 40 or even 45 measures per minute. It is an energetic, bouncy, up-and-down dance and is circular, with the man and woman dancing around each other. East Coast Swing is slower, circular, and instead of hopping up-and-down action, it has scoopy side-to-side movement in its stepping. Lindy is often even slower than East Coast Swing and has a more elastic, gliding kind of movement. And West Coast Swing and Hustle are the slowest of the group, at about 30 measures per minute. Even more characteristic, they are slot dances in which the woman dances back and forth on a linear path on the dance floor, and the man either blocks her way and sends her back or steps out of her way and dances around her. She never dances around him. She may get to feeling like a yo-yo in these dances, but a smooth and flowing yo-yo, not a jerky bouncy one.



Leading and following in the smooth rhythms, like waltz or foxtrot, come through your dance frame. In closed position, you have contact with your partner at your lead hands (man's left and woman's right), but you connect at many other points, too---the man's right hand on her back, the woman's left arm lying along his right and her left hand on his upper arm, and contact at the hips or lower torso. If this frame is kept toned, then lead and follow can be transmitted and felt at many points of contact.



In the swing rhythms, lead and follow comes much more through joined hands only, rather than broadly through the frame. We spend less time in any kind of closed

position and more time in an open facing position. However, a well-toned frame is still important. Keep your upper bodies relatively still, your shoulders parallel and horizontal, your arms not stiff but firmly toned. In this way, your body movements will be transmitted down your arms and to your partner. The lead will come from your frame, but indirectly, through the arms and hands. So, if you want your partner to move toward you, don't bend your arm and *pull* on her. Instead, step back with a toned upper body and so *draw* her toward you. Keep your hand connection low. Her center of gravity is at hip level, so movement directed there will move her body most effectively. If you aim a lead at a shoulder, only her shoulders will respond, not the whole body. Don't raise your handhold unless you want her to turn under.

The characteristic swing handhold aids in this kind of lead and follow. The man holds his hand in front of his body with his palm toward himself, his thumb up, and his fingers pointing across his body (i.e., fingers of left hand pointing right). The woman holds her hand up so that her palm faces her partner. Her fingers are up and her thumb points across her body (i.e., her right thumb points to her left). She then curls her fingers over the ridge formed by his palm edge and forefinger, sort of like she's hanging onto a branch. As he steps back, his palm and fingers will pull on her fingers. As he steps forward, the back of his hand and fingers will push against her palm. His thumb will gently lie on the tops of her fingers and allow him to move her hand to the right or left. The lead flows from the leader's frame, through his arm and hand, into her hand, arm, and frame.

