



# **Lead and Follow in West Coast Swing**

**by Harold & Meredith Sears**

**The woman's first step in West Coast is usually forward. In Jive, many figures begin with a rock apart—the man rocks back, and he leads the woman to rock back as well. In essence, she is "mirroring" his step. If he stood before a mirror and stepped back, his image would step back, too. In West Coast, the woman doesn't often mirror the man. Instead, she truly "follows" him. He steps back, and he draws her forward and toward him.**

**We should keep our joined hands low. The woman's forearm should be horizontal, and upper arms should be parallel to your torsos and tucked in. Lead and follow will be sharper and clearer if the upper arm is more connected to the upper body and the force through the lower arm is directed toward the body's center. If arms are loose and flopping around, the lead will be delayed and less clear. If hands are high, his lead will go toward her shoulder, and only her shoulder will move.**

**If you have very different heights, you might choose to hold your forearms in line with each other and therefore at an angle to the floor, rather than to have the taller person's forearm angled and the shorter person's forearm horizontal. The goal is to have a strong look, a strong connection, and a clear line of communication.**

**In leading, it is important not to rely on the hand and arm only. If the man wants to lead the woman forward, he must not pull her to him with his arm. Instead, both he and she must maintain toned arms. He steps back, not pulling, but drawing her toward him with his whole body. He "takes her with him." This is a much nicer image than one involving pulling, tugging, or jerking.**

**The tone in your arms must be firm but not stiff. Think about what happens when a train starts to move. The engine begins to roll. A bit later, the coupling with the next car grabs, and car #2 starts with a jerk. Then the next coupling grabs, and car #3 lurches forward. This is what**

**stiffness does. We want an elastic tone, so that the man can draw the woman forward smoothly and *not* with a jerk.**



**A diesel engine at the head of a train—you might get an image of a very strong lead and a passive follow. On the contrary, the man should not overdo his lead. Once you get her moving, let her dance the figure, moving down her slot. Try not to disturb her again until you must stop her or turn her within the slot. And following cannot be passive, because the man's and woman's steps are often so different from each other. More than in many rhythms, she needs to know the figures. She can't necessarily look at where the man is or at what he is doing and then adjust to match. Think of the Left Side Pass. His first step is back and her first step is forward. So far, so good, but then he steps side and back out of the slot, and her second step is again straight forward. There is no clear relationship between those two "second" steps. She has to know to stay in her slot (and not to follow him out of it).**

