

Let's Cuddle

by Harold & Meredith Sears

In many round dance figures, there is more going on than just the steps. The Cuddle is a Rumba figure (dance of love?) and the very name "Cuddle" tells us that there should be a particular focus on our partner. It's true that the unadorned steps of a Cuddle are fairly simple. We might be in closed position, man facing the wall with lead feet free. With quick-quick-slow timing, the woman swivels up to 1/2 to her right and we both step approximately side to a half-open position facing the wall. We both recover on the trail feet and the woman turns to her left, and finally we step to face partner and wall again. It's simple — but not very cuddly. These actions are independent of each other. We are stepping apart from one another on that first step. How can we go beyond the basic steps and get ourselves more together?

First, let's introduce some lead and follow into this figure. That's *always* a good way to connect with your partner. Let's initiate a little right-side stretch or left sway. She will respond with right sway, and this action will begin to open her head. Her head will rotate right, beginning her opening out to the right, which precedes her first step. But don't think of this in terms of the man making the woman do something, like a puppet-master and his marionette. Think of it as communication. He makes a suggestion, she responds, he responds to that — conversation. It's not man's part and woman's part. It's a couple thing.

Second, the man can begin to lower lead hands and partially relax the tone in his right arm. These changes go a little further in releasing her from closed position and inviting her to open out, but they constitute nonverbal communication and reassurance, too. We are about to let go of lead hands and separate briefly, but I'm still thinking about you, hon.

Third, the man can use a little right-face upper body rotation. We also call this left-side lead. He is turning his left shoulder into her and maintaining a toned frame through his arms, and she will respond by rotating her body to the right. Again, although his step will be to the left, he is not stepping away (escaping?) at the earliest possible moment. In these first moments of this first step, he is actually going with her, and she is focusing on him, centering on his body.



Well, the figure does call for an opening out, away from partner, so the man does reluctantly abandon his right-face body rotation, he draws his left shoulder back and begins to step side left. The woman has swiveled right and begins to step side right. But these are not really side steps away. The man has changed from right-side stretch to left-side stretch, and the woman is using right-side stretch to match him. We are swayed toward and turned toward partner. Second, in taking that side step, we step to the inside edge of the ball of the foot. We roll to the flat of the foot and put pressure into the floor, but we don't fully commit to the weight change. Rather than a step away, it is really more of pushing back toward partner.

Certainly this first step is the one with the drama, the reluctant parting. The second step resolves the conflict. We recover, the woman turns back to face the man, and she even places her right hand on the man's left shoulder — reassurance, indeed, that all is well in the relationship. The third step is a return to a close cuddle position.

Does this description seem melodramatic? We don't really want you to overdo this, full of yearning and passion, but don't just do the steps, either. In any round dance, let's not simply walk from our chairs, walk counter-clockwise once around the room, and then back to our chairs again. Let's focus on our partner, interact, and so go beyond the steps.

