



## COMFORTABLE DANCING

# Squeeze the Trigger

In target shooting, we are told to “squeeze the trigger.” Don’t pull it—with an abrupt action, you will miss the target. In dancing, too, we want to be “on target.” We don’t want to be bouncing about, ricocheting from here to there. We don’t want to jerk the trigger; we want to squeeze it, and what we’re really talking about is isometric muscular control.

In exercise, an isometric contraction is one where there is little actual movement, because another muscle is counteracting the effort of the first. Think about your dance frame. The uncontrolled dancer lets his elbows hang at his sides and even waffle around. His right hand slides down and wanders about. His left hand pushes and pulls, as he tries to “steer” her. The controlled dancer uses isometrics to dampen all this meaningless activity and maintain a toned frame.

Of course, we don’t want to stop movement. Dancing *is* movement, but we want the frame to move as a unit, not as independent parts. Isometric control is one set of muscles propelling us across the floor and an opposing set, working in other directions, to limit and fine-tune that motion.

One basic tool that we use are the shock absorbers that are present in our feet, ankles, and knees. In taking any step, we bend our knees, ankles, and maybe toes. For each step, make an effort to use both sets of muscles—those that cause the bending and those that resist and smooth out that action. So, when you dance a Chair, don’t land flat-footed with a sharp bump. Point your foot, land on the ball of your foot, lower to the heel, and allow the ankle and knee to flex enough to make the landing gentle. Or dance heel to toe. The rolling from the heel to the ball of the foot will similarly absorb some of the forward momentum and gentle the landing.



Second, think about rise and fall in the whole body. The Chair and many other figures are described as involving a “lunge” in some direction. But we mustn’t simply throw ourselves out there. In dancing a Right Lunge, lower first in a controlled manner, and then squeeze yourself out to the man’s right. Squeeze the arrival too by allowing the inside edge of your trail foot to contact the floor first, and then roll onto the flat of the foot. This horizontal trajectory is more gentle than a plummeting arc, and the rolling footwork absorbs some of the energy of the step and dissipates it gradually.

Third, stay close to your partner. Maybe you’re doing Open In and Out Runs. In semi-closed position, you step through with the trail foot, and the man turns right and steps to the side with his left. Just don’t step too far to the side. Barely shift to her right side and scoop her up in a cozy, left half-open position facing line. The third step is forward down line. If you make all three steps progress toward the wall, you’ll go too far, you’ll tug on her, and her Run will be a frantic dash to make the distance.

Keep your knees and ankles unlocked and ready to absorb and soften changes in speed and direction. Use gradual rise and fall to eliminate rocket take-offs and crash landings. Stay close to your partner so that your orbits around each other remain small and under control. Squeeze the trigger—don’t jerk it.



Harold & Meredith Sears  
[www.rounddancing.net/dance/](http://www.rounddancing.net/dance/)

