

Dance Etiquette – Part 2

ON THE DANCE FLOOR

Line of Dance

The dancing on a floor is done along a counter clockwise direction, known as the Line Of Dance. This applies to traveling dances including Waltz, Foxtrot, Tango, Quickstep, and Viennese Waltz, as well as Polka and two-step in the country western repertoire. Latin and Swing dances are more or less stationary and have no line of dance. Sometimes it is possible to dance more than one type of dance to the same song. For example, some Foxtrots can also be swings, and many Lindy Hop songs are just great for Quickstep. In that case, swing dancers take the middle of the floor, and the moving dancers move along the periphery in the direction of the line of dance.

Getting on the floor



Some caution should be exercised when getting on the dance floor, especially if the song has already started and couples are dancing on the floor. It is the responsibility of incoming couples to make sure that they stay out of the way of the couples already dancing. Specifically, before getting into dance position, one should always look opposite the line of dance to avoid blocking someone's way, or even worse, causing a collision.

At the end of the dance

After the dance is finished and before parting, thank your partner. This reminds me of a social partner who, upon being thanked at the end of the dance, would answer: "you're welcome!" This always gave me a funny feeling. The proper answer to "Thank you!" on the dance floor is: "Thank you!" The point is that the thanks are not due to a favor, but to politeness.

If you enjoyed the dance, let your partner know. Compliment your partner on her/his dancing. Be generous, even if he/she is not the greatest of dancers. Be specific about it if you can: "I really enjoyed that double reverse spin. You led/followed that beautifully!" If you enjoyed it so much that you would like to have another dance with him/her again, this is a good time to mention it: "This Waltz went really great! I'd like to try a Cha-Cha with you later." Although remember that dancing too many dances with the same partner and booking many dances ahead are both violations of social dance rules.

Leaving the floor

When a song comes to an end, leave the floor as quickly as it is gracefully possible. Tradition requires that the gentleman give his arm to the lady and take her back to her seat at the end of the dance. While this custom is linked to the outdated tradition requiring the gentlemen to ask ladies for dances, it is still a nice touch, although it may be impractical on the more crowded dance floors. In any case, remember that your partner may want to get the next dance. Don't keep them talking after the dance is over, if they seem ready to break away to look for their next partner.

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Leaving entrances free

Some dance floors, especially in country western dance establishments, have limited access space (most of the periphery is railed). Dancers and onlookers should avoid blocking these entrances. In particular, avoid stopping to chat immediately after exiting the dance floor. Another issue in Country Western dancing regards line dancers, who sometimes share the floor with other dancers. They should avoid blocking entrances from the inside while dancing.

Sharing the floor

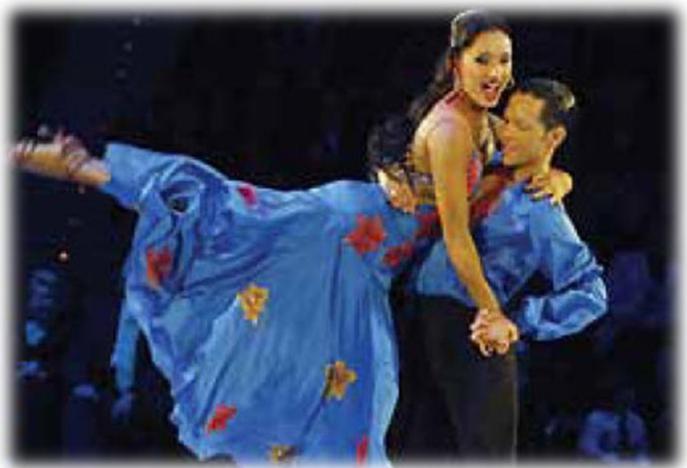
Responsible usage of the floor requires that one stays out of the way of others. Some figures require a momentary movement against line of dance. These figures should be executed with great caution on a social dance floor, and only when there is no danger of collision. Avoid getting too close to other couples, especially less experienced ones. Be prepared to change the directions of your patterns to avoid congested areas. This requires thinking ahead and matching your patterns to the free areas on the floor (floor craft). While this may sound complicated to the novice dancer, it gradually becomes second nature.

Sharing the floor sometimes means leaving the floor! For example, if there are too many dancers to fit on the floor, then a considerate dancer would withdraw every few dances to let everyone dance. The same idea applies if there aren't the same numbers of men and women. Then there is a mismatch and for each song some people will be left without a partner. If there aren't enough partners, it would be nice to voluntarily withdraw every few dances so that everyone gets a chance to dance.

Another aspect of sharing the floor is to match one's speed to that of others. In a recent social dance, a particularly tall and handsome couple caught my eye. They were moving with great speed and skill across the floor, and I began to enjoy watching them dance. But then I noticed they were coming dangerously close to other dancers on the crowded dance floor, and many times other couples came to a stop and moved out of their way. It was easy to see they were unhappy about this couple "taking over" the floor.

Aerials and choreography

The only thing to be said about aerials on the social dance floor is: don't do them. While they may look "cool," the execution of aerials requires training by a qualified instructor. Don't do them by yourself unless you are trained, and certainly don't do them on the social dance floor. Dancers have been badly hurt by either participating in aerials, or unluckily being in the proximity of those who did. In fact, in 1996, a swing dancer [died](#) during the execution of an aerial. Aerials can be extremely dangerous, please take this issue seriously.



The same principle applies to other lifts and drops, as well as choreographed patterns that require a large amount of floor space.

No-Fault Dancing

Never blame a partner for missed execution of figures. Once in a social dance I accidentally overheard a novice couple, where the lady said: "I can do this step with everyone but you!" The fact that she was wrong (I had seen

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her other attempts) is irrelevant. The point is that she was unkind and out of line. Even if the gentleman were at fault, she was not to say something like that.

Regardless of who is at fault when a dancing mishap occurs, both parties are supposed to smile and go on. This applies to the better dancer in particular, who bears a greater responsibility. Accepting the blame is especially a nice touch for the gentleman. But at the same time, do not apologize profusely. There is no time for it, and it makes your partner uncomfortable.

My personal preference is the following: whenever something untoward happens, I first see if my partner noticed. Sometimes the partner may not be aware, for example, that a figure was slightly off-time or that a fine point in technique was missed, in which case it is better to let it go. If she has noticed, I just smile and whisper "sorry..." and go on, regardless of whose fault it was.

Did Your Partner Enjoy the Dance?

Dancing to the level of partner

It often happens that the two partners dancing socially are not at the same level. It is important that the more experienced partner dances at the level of the less experienced partner. This is mostly a comment for leaders: when dancing with a new partner, start with simple figures, and gradually work your way up to more complicated patterns. You will discover a comfort level; file it away in memory for the next time you dance with the same partner.

The same principle applies to Latin and Swing followers, although to a lesser degree. Doing extra syncopations, footwork, free spins etc. can be distracting and even intimidating for a less experienced leader. Although I must say that the show-off follower is rather rare; most of the violations of this sort are by leaders who lead inexperienced partners into complicated figures.

Being sensitive to partner's preferences

Social dancers strive to make their partners comfortable and help them enjoy the dance. This requires sensitivity to the likes and dislikes of the partner. These preferences can take a variety of forms. For example, I remember that one of my West Coast Swing social partners found neck wraps uncomfortable. In the same manner, some dancers don't like spins (or many spins in a row), while others really enjoy them. Some like extended syncopations and others don't. There are many more examples in various dance venues. Be sensitive to your partners. It is not too hard to detect their likes and dislikes, and if in doubt, ask.

Demeanor

Be personable, smile, and make eye contact with your partner. Try to project a warm and positive image on the dance floor, even if that is not your personal style. Many of us lead hectic lives that include a difficult balance between study, work, family, and other obligations. Having a difficult and tiring day, however, is not an acceptable excuse for a depressing or otherwise unpleasant demeanor on the dance floor. Because of the setting of a social dance, we do not always dance with our favorite partners. This is also not grounds for a cold treatment of the partner. Once one asks or accepts a dance, it is important to be outwardly positive, even if not feeling exactly enthusiastic.

The social dancer is also well advised to be watchful of an unchecked ego. While a healthy sense of self is helpful in all social interactions, it is more attractive when mixed with an equal dose of modesty. Don't let perceived dancing abilities or physical attractiveness go to your head. It is helpful to remember that overestimating one's dance prowess or attractiveness is quite common.