



Dancing with a Twist (or Dance like an Egyptian)

And so the saga continues for dance lovers social to professional. How do you line your body up against another person and dance comfortably around the dance floor to either impress each other or the judges? Well when I was competing I felt it was a life long struggle and a hit or miss process. Having come out the other end of the tunnel where I assure you there is light I now feel I can share a few tidbits that might make life a little easier. A great quote from Master Yogi B.K.S. Iyengar “Your body should be in pieces and your mind whole. Most have their mind in pieces and their body whole.” Simply stated frozen in one piece. How brilliant is that! With that clarification lets start this way.

Please note this article only addresses dance position and shared axis-center of partner ship. What I suggest you may use in your movements and dancing but I will save moving with technique and partner for another article.

First and foremost we must acknowledge we have two people trying to dance with a shared axis or center between then through out the dance. To make a simple picture the gentleman’s right shoulder, rib, hip, knee and foot and ladies right shoulder, rib, hip, knee and foot. I use this example because people can picture and identify bones as a visual in their bodies a little easier than with the muscles. When I looked up the definition of Axis there was a minimum of ten to pick from. HA! And they all seemed to apply to this topic in one form or another. So I picked one of the easiest to understand and if you have another definition I say Bravo. AXIS: A straight line about which a body or geometric object rotates or may be conceived to rotate.

So when two people face each other how do you connect this shared axis? Very simple you don't. You can only connect to your own body shape and work at coordinating a shared axis with partner assuming you both have and are applying the same information and technique.

For me trying to fit the man was always a disaster simply because it made me not fully responsible for my own body actions. It is nice to coordinate but to be at the mercy of another human beings body language never mind their personality or opinions well.... Is not always the best use of one's time and energies? Back to business 😊

In order to accommodate the weight shift with ease and maintain four separate tracks of weight our bodies must shape individually to "connect" in comfort and movement. The definition of CBM: Contrary Body Movement is: A Body Action. "The Turning of the opposite side of the body towards the moving foot which is moving forward or back generally to initiate turn." That's the key phrase right there. What does "body" mean? And on top of that we have to turn or rotate with it. If we just walked forward and back we would all be champions. What would have helped me tremendously in my day would have been a clearer explanation of Core (especially the oblique and abdominal areas) and how all of that created the individual body shape that I would be responsible for instead of trying to "match and fit my partner" A different reference point altogether. If you learn how to twist and torque your own core you can then create an on going shaping action in your body that you can dance through before either of you take a step. Which will result in assisting both people to rotate around the partnership's shared axis. Lets talk about how.

Some suggestions to learn what muscles create the torque in your core are. Walk to a flat surface like a mirror very close nose and feet touching. Swivel feet, knees and thighs to the left and turn your hips and shoulders to the right. Engage the Abdominals and Oblique's strongly. This can be called twist, torque, spiral, and a constant state of traction or rotation in the core. Try to get as flat as possible. Picture a hieroglyphic. Also be aware it is not just the hips and shoulders. The core connects it all together. The muscles in this exercise are called Synergists or simply stated muscles working together. They are External Oblique , Internal Oblique , The Multifidi and lastly The Rotatores. These last two sets of muscles are very close to the spine.

Try to press the right side of your face against the mirror. Pick up your arms and hands like an Egyptian if that helps. Then reverse the whole process to the right. Don't forget to turn the other check 😊 Practice this over and over until you have a strong range of movement. You might not ever use it to that degree but always better to tone down than not be full enough. An interesting note, in Yoga we call the result of this action wringing all the toxins out of the spine.

Both partners must be proficient in this exercise. You will note the result is "your body is in pieces" etc... as previously quoted. If you are having difficulty producing this or teaching this it may be modified in a chair. Sit perpendicular in the chair facing left. Feet, legs and hips will not move. Spine straight. Place left hand on upper left outside

edge of the back of the chair and right hand on the closer outside edge to you. Begin to push with the left hand and pull with the right. Keep the elbows wide and let the rotation commence to the left. Head is included and may turn as well. Obviously switch legs and feet to the right side and begin again.

Next approach each other but do not take hold. I tell couples to walk toward each other like a Picasso Picture. Be that picture with the two eyes on one side of the face. Or like an Egyptian. Ladies extend your right arm over the man's right shoulder. Try to make contact with your under arm and his shoulder area. Minimum your hand and forearm should be protruding behind his back and remember it is straight. Keeping four tracks of weight between you or keeping right foot to right foot or right knee-to-knee as a loose guideline. The couple has just created the axis the partnership rotates and moves around and must never be violated. This is the best reference point you could ask for. Shape yourself to "fit" the axis not each other. Gentlemen you may choose to connect your right wrist or hand under her left under arm area just keep your elbow higher than your wrist. Again this twisting action of the forearm is called Supination. Put your left hand on her right shoulder. Gentleman you can turn your face slightly left. Ladies as a suggestion you can put you're left hand behind your head and gently pull your elbow and head leftward. From this point on there is now light at the end of the tunnel. Stay there and feel the shape in closed position , change the shape to a promenade position or a counter promenade position. You don't have to move off the spot. Just swivel you're feet, knees etc...like the hieroglyphic exercise against the mirror. Take baby steps forward and back side-to-side outside partner etc, like a social dancer. Learn the form before range. Learn these shapes before you step. If you can produce these shapes relative to the axis the rest is just degree. A good thought for this process is we are not trying for perfection but awareness.

Also you will have a silhouette that can never be beat. When I watch couples dance and compete they have beautiful movement but there can be flaws in their silhouette. If you have a number on your back and more than one side of the room is watching at all times then every angle must look good at all times.

Let me reiterate this article addresses a small section of the big piece of the puzzle known as Ballroom Dance. Separate articles alone can be done on foot speed, leg swing, body swing, foot pressure etc... But the one thing you will know is your core will never be in a neutral position. Your legs and feet may be but not your core. If you can apply just a little of this action to yourself and your partner you might dance like an Egyptian after all. Let your body be in pieces and your mind whole. Now that's dancing with a twist. Enjoy the light at the end of the tunnel. Maybe now you know how.

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