

## Trend Technique and Technology. Or “PASS THE TORCH!”



What is a trend? The general direction in which something “tends” to move.

What is Technique? The way in which the fundamentals, as of an artistic work are Handled.

What is Technology? The body of knowledge available to a society that is of use in fashioning implements, practicing manual arts and skills, and extracting or collecting materials.

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I am choosing these three words because this is what I have experienced in today's Dance Sport Competitions. I am aware of the everyday world with all of its progression and how everything is affected by it including Ballroom Dance.

Picture this. The 1930's.

Trend: Ladies skirts were below the knee and fitted. People doing Ballroom had to dance with a conservative leg action. To open their legs wider was uncomfortable with their outfits and also considered unlady like. Resulting in technique leaning towards extreme body shaping and silhouette. Not a lot of movement. Enter Alex Moore et al and the technique books. The standard has been set.

Fast forward to the 1950's.

Trend: Ladies are wearing poodle “puff” skirts. Resulting in greater range in the leg and body actions. Even more with the 1960's the mini skirt is the rage. So you can see where I am heading. In the progression of things I have always been taught and observed that many things influence the visual art forms including fashion.

I remember having a coaching with Bill Irvine years ago in England and he casually mentioned how he and Bobbie started to cross train in Ballet. The end result was their lines in the throw away for example were huge due to the epaulement (use of shouldering) “technique” implemented in their dance. Trend with technique perhaps? I am sure their style as well as many other greats like Peter Eggleton contributed unlimited nuances to today's competitive Ballroom scene. Incredible Masters like Walter Laird based the Rumba walk on a “tendu” straight leg pointing action from Ballet. He told me he watched the way the good female dancers performed the feather finish in Foxtrot and that set him thinking for the leg and foot placement of the “forward walk turning” Technique mixed with trend? Today's Hip Hop and Rap will influence how some one perceives a Cha-Cha. How well can they do it? Can they do it keeping some fundamentals in there so all can relate? All of this results in Dance Sport.

When coaching and teaching all over the country as well as judging I am very aware that Dance Sport has fully matured. Lets look at that term for a brief moment. Today's top SPORT'S athletes have the best of everything. They have gadgets to track their progress and improve their performance. Being hooked up to computers and all kinds of equipment to monitor and alter their bodies allows them to break unheard of records. They have specialists and coaches for EVERYTHING! Nutrition, breathing, walking and mind control projection techniques. How could we not expect Ballroom Dance to be effected as well? The human race lives longer then it did one hundred years ago. The average person is taller, larger and healthier. The Scientific world is cloning plants, animals and humans. I think you get my point. So when I read articles and hear comments from different coaches or from anyone claiming there was no artistry, no character, or musicality in certain couples I want to ask, “Why are you surprised”? “Why so critical”?

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Lets have a little empathy here. Imagine what the young people of today are stimulated by. Electrical devices. They are plugged in to everything. No boundaries. Exposed to sex and violence and the dreaded reality show on every channel. Don't you think these vibrations put into the energy fields of our universe would affect Ballroom Dance? So why would that not shape Dance Sport today? What was considered “normal” fifty years ago is extinct! Why surprised at the lack of something? There is no need to interact with your fellow human being. Never mind acknowledge your dance partner! Which by the way can be Man and Woman, Man and Man or Woman and Woman. Just like life.

If I speak to a Ballet Master of yesteryear they prefer the traditional classical Ballet (think Degas paintings) because maybe that was their generations standard. Fast-forward to George Balanchine and the creation of Neo-Classical ballet. A Painters canvas displaying French Impressionism. Martha Graham rebelling against the rigid world of Ballet and daring to create Modern Dance. Musicians inventing new rhythms for your ear. We must include singers, actors, writers, philosophers and choreographers. It has all contributed to the universal energies, which we call present time today. Now whether you relate to any of this past present or future is up to you and your reality.

Just a thought and of course having an affinity to my “own” era of dance what I have learned is no matter how much you moan and groan it is what it is. When I judge, coach or lecture I am aware of my background and what I bring forth but I try to be open to what is really happening and influencing the world today. I remember watching an interview with Madonna and they asked her how she started a new video or project. She didn't hesitate and said that she always searches for the youngest and freshest talent to stay in touch with today's pulse. I thought very smart in deed. Not letting go of her worth as a mature lady and superstar but being smart enough to acknowledge and incorporate what is happening around her. Brilliant! And if not for her we would never have artists like Lady Ga Ga, Beyonce or Brittany Spears. There is something to be said for “passing the torch”

Playing devils advocate if you as a dance personality are disappointed with the direction of our field take responsibility and change it. Myself included. Pick a leading couple that you coach and change everything they do to what you would like to see in a final to make it resonate with you. See if what you do really makes a difference in this present day dance world. And notice I say what makes it resonate with you. That to me is the issue. The hardest thing to accept again myself included is it is not about YOU and how the final makes YOU feel compared to when YOU used to dance. It is about the actual work. What we are dealing with in this present second. Ballroom Dance. If you want more musicality and less body flight in Tango instead of reliving your past step up with what goes on in today's top sports camps and give workshops until you drop. Produce a DVD and explain the differences and why. And most importantly instead of constantly hammering on what is wrong with today's dance sport or art form

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GIVE THE SOLUTION! Address trend, technique or technology. Positive action equals positive results.

Do you think the Russian Ballet Masters knew that when they were creating their work that someone named George Balanchine would come along and re-create what they did? I think not. But I am sure where ever they are they are pleased that they could contribute to the evolution of that process. So the next time you are writing an article, judging, lecturing or coaching try to remember that we are all apiece in the puzzle moving forward. What we did in the past has been coded and put into today's dance world. And it has made a difference. Embrace what is happening in this second only. Comparing what we all did in the past to today's Dance world especially while judging in my opinion is a waste. Teach by example of being kind to yourselves and others. These young amazing dancers will learn from our manners and behavior patterns especially at a competition. I remember the magical soul called Benny Tolymer telling me “I could do what ever I wanted as long as it was not offensive to his eye. I always thought that was so progressive of him. He had such a youthful energy around him. Maybe this is why he was so great he embraced all in front, behind and ahead. Fundamental principle is important at all times but does not rule the world.

If you or I are really offended by something find a gentle way to offer an alternative or solution. Think Eastern and Western medicine or philosophies. Sometimes one or a combination of both is required. Many facets must be taken into consideration in today's turbulent world. Contributing to the energy of Dance Sport you will find it comes back to you thrice fold. Trend, Technique and Technology is now! Go ahead PASS THE TORCH!!!

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