

Partnership Dance: A Fun Way to Build Skills and Confidence

By Kaye West

Partnership dance is a style of dancing where two people work together to perform different dance moves. Typically, partners include one male who is the **Lead** and one female who is the **Follow**. But these days in round dancing, which provides the most effective way to learn partnership dancing, two females or two males might choose to dance as partners, and it is also possible for a single person to dance with a phantom partner, as I have done for decades.

Periodically dance leaders offer new classes, often devoted to a particular rhythm. For example, in Mesa, Arizona beginning in November, 2026, three different rhythms of partnership dance will be offered for new dancers: **Jive**, which is a popular energetic rhythm from the Swing collection, **Bolero**, which is a slow-paced dance combining smooth, graceful moves of Rumba and Waltz, and **Foxtrot** using the gliding International style with the Slow-Quick-Quick (SQQ) timing pattern requiring four counts as opposed to **Social Foxtrot** which has Slow-Slow-Quick-Quick (SSQQ), requiring six counts. All of these rhythms begin with some basic figures so sticking with the rhythm over a period of years allows dancers to acquire a large repertoire of dance figures so they can dance many routines which are cued so dancers need not memorize them.

It is important to learn the characteristic timing of the rhythm and the basic steps. The dance classes start with simple movements and provide abundant “floor time” with randomly cued figures which had been previously introduced. Learning the basics helps dancers build confidence and develop good habits. It is also important to practice regularly. Even practicing for twenty to thirty minutes a few times each week can help improve balance, coordination, and memory.

Roundalab, the organization of round dance teachers, has standardized lists of figures, and they can be found at <https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/rhythms.html>. Students can select the desired rhythm and find the “Figures and Sources” link to retrieve the checklist for that rhythm in order to monitor their progress.

Foxtrot has many of the figures identified with a red asterisk which indicates that those figures are included in a book which is online (***Fancy Figures: Phase III Moderns***, pp. 13-71), and the majority of the figures have footprints to follow. The **Jive** checklist includes a reference for many of the figures (in ***Fancy Figures: Phase III Latins***, pp. 125-150). The **Bolero** rhythm also has a list of figures, but it was introduced to round dancing after those books were published.

Those books are available to download in their entirety **free** for people who join the International Choreographed Ballroom Dance Association (ICBDA) at <https://www.icbda.com/>. Dues are a modest \$15.00 per person per year. On the *member home page*, the link for the **Beginning Dance Manuals** is on the right-hand column under the heading “HOW TO DANCE.”

Partnership dancing requires teamwork, communication, and practice. While learning partnership dance may seem difficult at first, anyone can improve with patience and regular practice. I recall back in the 1970s when I first learned round dancing, I felt that I would never

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learn it. But sticking with it pays off! So of course I learned it (and am continuing to learn!), and others can as well. In my first book about how to do round dancing, I included the formula:

Beginning + Perseverance = Accomplishment

Regardless of the endeavor one is pursuing, that formula is instructive! Which element is missing? Starting or keeping with it? Address the missing ingredient to achieve success. Learning any skill requires instruction and a *great deal of practice*!

Partnership dancing requires that both people work together. One person usually leads while the other follows, but both dancers must pay attention to each other's movements and become accustomed to moving in close proximity and synchronized with another person. Clear communication, patience, and respect help partners learn more quickly and enjoy dancing together.

Mistakes are a normal part of learning, and they should be seen as opportunities to improve instead of reasons to give up. As a matter of fact, I recall in my early dancing days that at about the time that I thought I was recalling what to do to respond to particular cues, I began to make mistakes which I hadn't made when I was concentrating intently on the specific steps and timing (the "beat and the feet"). Having studied learning theory, I realized that this was a sign of progress, not regression!

When there have been sufficient repetitions, one's brain *automatically* begins transferring the information to long-term memory instead of the short-term or working memory which is used when first learning something new. Some call this "muscle memory," and with time and thousands of repetitions the brain will allocate the response to well-known cues to the "autonomic muscle system," skipping the step of the brain interpreting and then transferring the information to the muscles to move appropriately. So expect mistakes! Initially they help dancers know what *not* to do, and later they are a sign of growth! And all should realize that *everyone* makes mistakes, even extremely experienced dancers. That is characteristic of being human!

Benefits

Dancing is not only a fun activity, but also it provides many physical, mental, and social benefits. In the area of physical health, dancing is excellent exercise because it strengthens muscles, improves balance, increases flexibility, and raises heart health. It also helps with coordination and posture. Unlike some forms of exercise, dancing is enjoyable, making people more likely to stay active over time.

Partnership dance also supports mental health. Learning dance routines (and responding timely to cues) challenges the brain and improves memory and concentration. Dancing can reduce stress because it allows people to focus on the music and movement

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instead of daily worries. Many people feel happier and more relaxed after a dance class because physical activity releases chemicals in the brain that improve mood.

Another major benefit is building confidence. As dancers learn new skills and improve through practice, they become more confident in their abilities. Dancing the various routines or dancing at social events helps people become more comfortable meeting new people and speaking with confidence.

Partnership dance also teaches valuable life skills. Dancers learn teamwork, trust, communication, and patience. These skills are useful not only on the dance floor but also in classes, at work, and in everyday relationships. Working closely with a partner teaches people how to cooperate, solve problems together, and support each other's success.

Finally, partnership dance is a great way to meet new people and become part of a community. Dance classes, clubs, and social events bring together people of all ages and backgrounds who share the same interest, regardless of backgrounds and past experiences. Many lifelong friendships begin through dancing because it creates a welcoming and positive environment.

Round Dancing Offers Dancing Opportunities Around the World

Also, round dancing is a world-wide movement, and there are round dance opportunities available at many clubs and festivals not only in the United States but also most commonly in Canada, Germany, Sweden, Japan, and Australia. Roundalab states that there are round dance teachers in thirty-six countries! So those who like to travel, particularly in the summer, are able to do so in conjunction with attending dance conventions and festivals.

Sources for finding such events are

- Where's the Dance: <https://www.wheresthedance.com/> (see the flyers or select a geographic area and then "events")
- Roundalab: <https://roundalab.org/upcoming-events-table-view-four/>
- ICBD: <https://www.icbda.com/dance-events/> Members can also access the list of Carousel Clubs around the world!

In conclusion, learning partnership dance is a rewarding experience that offers much more than learning dance steps. It improves physical fitness, strengthens the mind, builds confidence, and teaches important social skills. Although it takes time and practice to become a skilled dancer, the journey is enjoyable and worthwhile. Anyone willing to learn, practice, and work with a partner can experience the many benefits that partnership dance has to offer. Opportunities to begin are abundant in Mesa, the "Round Dance Capital of the World." Consider beginning lessons in the rhythm of your choice!