

Do You Know...

there is always *something* to learn about dancing?

By Kaye West

At this point in my own journey, after learning from many of our top leaders, dancing for over forty years, teaching round dancing myself for over ten years and, in the round dance tradition, sharing what I have learned, especially via writings, I continue to be extremely aware that there is still much more for me to learn!

That lesson was readily apparent when over twenty years ago, at one of our Mesa round dance weekends, ballroom instructor Larry Caves brought his Arizona State University ballroom students to perform a group demonstration for us. I was enthralled by the outstanding techniques they used.... And yet, they were dancers in their *first semester* of learning to dance! How could it be that after dancing for just a few months they were able to dance in ways I only dreamed of being able to do after some twenty-five years? There must be secrets and techniques that I had not yet been exposed to, or principles I was not putting into practice correctly.

Come to find out, even after half a century of studying and teaching dance, Larry, too, is still discovering techniques which take advantage of body mechanics, physics, and simply questioning whether a particular practice makes sense. He has also recounted that when some of the current top champions come to the studio to teach, they may describe actions in the same manner in which they (and he) learned them, but *how they danced* did not always conform with *what they were saying*! In other words, over the years they had discovered procedures which worked much better than what they learned initially, and were rewarded for it by winning competitions! Yet, they were not always aware that their *practice had evolved*, though their way of *talking about their craft* sometimes had not!

We are all constantly learning; there is more all of us can learn; and simultaneously our body of knowledge is constantly expanding and some of our dancers and leaders are growing older and retiring. How can we help new dancers and dance leaders learn more, faster than has been possible in the past so our activity can continue to thrive?

One thing we can do is simply to encourage everyone we know (possibly especially young people) to try social dancing. Larry and I have collaborated to describe a series of lessons folks can read and implement, available free to anyone with internet access 24/7 at <http://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/dance.html>. The first seven lessons introduce concepts of timing as well as patterns in Social Foxtrot, Single Swing, Waltz, Rumba, and Cha Cha which anyone can learn and use in social dancing.

We also have uploaded videos for the Social Foxtrot patterns. When dancers first implement the patterns, they don't look like the professionals in the videos (the pros themselves didn't look that good initially, either!!), so Lesson 10, "Dance Like a Pro: Some Secrets Revealed" describes a few of the techniques that dancers can implement to take their dancing to a higher level (beyond the "beat and feet" which unquestionably dancers must learn first). Arthur Murray began teaching dancing at age 19, and some of our leaders also began teaching as teenagers. Surely there are other "Arthur Murray's" out there, so we need to find them, introduce them to round dancing, and nurture them.

Perhaps the greatest source of potential recruits to round dancing is those doing social or ballroom dancing. So we need to be able to communicate with them as well. Round dancers need to attend social dance events to be living, breathing "dancing advertisements" of some of the variety available in dancing! Yet, many round dancers do not do social dancing because they believe they have insufficient variety without a cuer telling them what to do!

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Can we help such folks? Larry and I are currently sharing information to enhance dancers' Cha Cha (including how to *lead* various figures) in three "teaching routines" with extensive Supplemental Notes (available at the same website under "Round Dance Rhythms Chart" > Cha Cha). Besides enjoying these routines in round dance circles, we hope readers find the Notes the equivalent of hundreds of hours of "private lessons" which many may not have access to and which would take many years to acquire!

Additionally, collectively there are six eight-measure sequences which can be danced interchangeably on the social dance floor. Dancers can begin with one sequence and dance it repeatedly until they have it memorized (the first has only *three figures!*). Then they can add a second sequence, and later a third, etc. (They can also borrow from other dances or create their own patterns.) The collective information, which has taken hundreds of ballroom dance lessons for me to acquire, is available for free, though it does take study-type reading and the perseverance to gradually implement the techniques! (I'm still working on them!!)

When others compliment them for their dancing and want to learn how they can learn more, it is an easy matter to refer them, via a business card, to the same website for links to information which describe round dancing and how *they too* can get involved! (Find a link for creating such cards at the same website at the bottom of the first page.)