

Balance While Rotating

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(The information below is based on information we have gleaned from a variety of sources. Your experience may differ. This is the third article in the Balance Series -- "Stand On Your Own Two Feet, Not Your Partner's". The previous articles on balance can be found on <http://hometown.aol.com/ctkr/dance.html>)

A trouble spot for balance generally occurs on figures than include rotation. When preparing and during a turning figure we often see a lovely topline (hands to shoulders & rib cage to head) fold in on itself. One or both of the partners panic and strange things begin to happen.

The natural tendency for the leader (generally the man – we can dream can't we?) to do on a turning figure is to lift their shoulders up into your ears and grab the follower (generally the woman) tightly around her body pulling her into him. Let's see, how many basic balancing and partnering skills just got mutilated?

- Lifting your shoulders can lead to your & your partner's arms pulling in towards your bodies, instead of maintaining a nice open topline.
- Grabbing your partner tightly around her body also pulls her off balance and when she is off balance, who do you think is carrying around that extra weight that she is not supporting? We have often heard men telling their partners that they (woman) feels like a Mack Truck with all the gears frozen and the emergency brake on. Gentlemen, it is not her fault – that is if you are truly doing the leading.
- Grabbing her tightly around her body can result in cutting off her ability to take the full breaths. Oxygen is our friend.
- Another thing that often happens is that the human animal, feeling fear of surviving the ever dangerous turning figure (the "fight or flight" instinct!), stops breathing. So now you have a death grip on your partner, your shoulders in your ears, you are dragging your partner around the floor (not quite in caveman style, but...), and you are not breathing. Sounds like natural selection of the species might pass you on by.

In reality, you have done exactly the opposite of what needs to be done to get body rotation and ease of figure execution. Couples need to relax their shoulders, keeping their topline wide & open, and stay on your separate sides of the fence holding your own weight over your own building blocks (heads to spine to hips to feet).

The first step of a rotating figure is typically used to determine direction, speed, and to communicate this information to your partner. Begin the step by lowering into your supporting foot's knee and move your upper body weight slightly forward (for forward moving figures) towards the direction of travel (LOD, RLOD, diagonals...). Begin to roll your foot weight from your heel to the ball of your foot in preparation for the other foot to move. This gives the woman time to respond to your 'lead' and get out of the way, thus clearing an opening for you to move into. You might feel a slight delay in actually taking weight on the first step until the second half of the beat in waltz or beat number two in foxtrot (SQQ with the "S" standing for slow equaling two beats of music). This type of movement is a the key ingredient in controlling the "Subway Ride" – when the bodies of the man & his partner start bumping against one another as you move forward or backwards.

"Lead Direction Before Rotation." This means that if the rotation occurs while you are traveling (down LOD, RLOD, on the diagonals...), use the first step to convey to your partner the direction of movement with a hint of the turn to come at the end of the first step. If the figure includes a stationary spin (a turn in place), use your first step to indicate that she should stay in place (in the same spot), again with a hint of the turn to come at the end of the first step. The golden rule of leading states, **"Lead what you want, but take what you get."** (*unknown originator of this quote*)

The second step in the majority of rotating figures is normally where the majority of the turning takes place. Extending the time spent on the second step slightly will help make rotating figures easier and more fluid.

The third step is the "get your act together step". Use this step to finish any rotation still needed and ground your body at the end of the step so you can start the next measure from a neutral, well balanced position.

Rotation Exercise #1: Arms & shoulders are not only wonderful momentum builders & momentum sustainers; they act as counterbalance stabilizers for the entire partnership.

- Stand upright, holding your arms away from your body slightly, swing only your arms to the right (clockwise) as far as is comfortable, and then swing only your arms to the left (counterclockwise) as far as is comfortable
- Repeat the exercise, but now allow your arms, shoulders, and spine to swing to the right (clockwise) as far as is comfortable, and then swing to the left (counterclockwise). Practice this one keeping your hips & head as still as possible
- Now, repeat this exercise again, but this time allow your head to join your arms, shoulders, and spine while swinging to the right and left (clockwise & counterclockwise) as far as is comfortable. Repeat all three swinging exercises paying attention to how your body reacts to each.

Tips to help make Turning Figures Easier & More Comfortable:

- **Breathe!** On step #1 of a turning figure take a deep cleansing breath in, not just a quick gulp, and visualize releasing all of your anxiety and stress, and relaxing your upper body with the outgoing breath. Sorry, went metaphysical on you.
- Keep your eyes forward or slightly up. Try not to look down as this can play havoc with your inner ear creating dizziness and nausea. For those who get dizzy, try 'spotting'. Focus on one point for as long as possible before turning your head around to catch up with the body and refocus on the same or another spot. The head is therefore being kept as still as possible for as long a time as possible while the body is continually moving. This enables the fluid in the inner ear fluid to remain relatively still longer.
- Relax your shoulders & neck – breathe!
- Keep your body, mainly your spine, upright. Avoid tilting or leaning off to the side, forward, or back. Keep your belly, chest, & pelvis out of your partner's space.
- Keep your knees slightly bent & relaxed, not locked
- Keep your knees over the big toe, the more stable part of the foot.
- Try to keep your weight on the balls of your feet. Avoid rising to your toes or falling back to your heel during the turn.
- Imagine the turn beginning with your hips and rising through your spine and onto your head to some point above your body, like a marionette.
- Absorb any foot & ankle rise with your knees & hips to avoid the bouncing ball look.

Rotation Exercise #2:

Find a straight line on a floor. A seam or joint will do. Stand on the line with one foot directly in back of the other, toe to heel, perfectly straight ahead, both feet in line. Shift your body weight forward then back and finally back to center without moving your feet.

Next, turn the big toes of both feet outward slightly at an angle to the seam on the floor keeping your heels on the floor seam. The feet will be in a very narrow ballet first position. Now repeat shifting your body weight forward then back and finally back to the center without moving your feet.

Which foot position gave you the most security and was easier to keep you on balance?

We hope that the topics presented in the series of articles on balance will help make the execution of figures easier, more comfort, and lead to more enjoyment in your dancing.