

# Standing On Your Own Two Feet, Not Your Partner's

By Chris & Terri Cantrell

*(This information has been gleaned from a variety of sources. Your experience may differ.)*

One of the most important and challenging needs of a dancer is to be on balance. Compensating for a loss of balance can result in all sorts of interesting things happening to one or both partners: leaning (the 'vulture'), pulling/tugging/dragging resulting in the man or the woman feeling heavy to the other partner (the 'Mack Truck' effect), teetering...

**Posture:** Many of the balance problems people experience are the result of poor posture (how we carry our body). Good posture can be described as stacking blocks. When standing, starting from the bottom up:

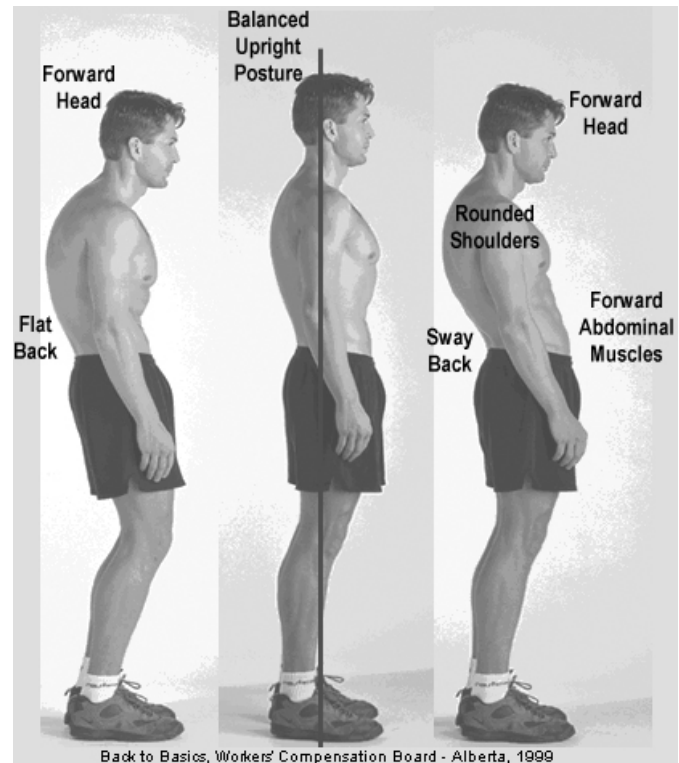
**Foot Weight:** Stand in bare feet and feel where the floor makes contact with them. For dancing you generally want to keep the bulk of your weight over the big toe side of your foot.

**Hips & Pelvis:** Tuck the tush & suck in the gut. Tuck your hips in to bring your pelvis in line with your spine but not to the point where you stick out your gut towards your partner.

**Lengthen your Spine:** The most important block of posture is the vertebrae in the spinal column, followed by the hips & pelvis. A person's back/spine includes your tail bone (coccyx), the sacrum, the lumbar spine, the thoracic (chest) spine, and the neck spine that goes all the way to the back of the head. Visualize placing on vertebra on top of another from the tail bone to the base of the head aligned with the natural curve of the body.

**Shoulders:** If you have placed each vertebra in line your shoulders will follow. Strive to keep your shoulders relaxed & upright and out of your ears. Breathing helps.

**Long Neck:** The final block is your head. Keep your head upright on top of your spine.



Posture/Balance Exercise:

- With your back facing a wall, position your hips against the wall. BREATHE
- Suck in your tummy in an attempt to get the small of your back against the wall at the same time as your hips. BREATHE
- Next place your shoulders against the wall, this will result in the small of your back pulling slightly away from the wall, but keep that tummy sucked in. BREATHE
- Now with your hips & shoulders against the wall, rest the back of your head against the wall. BREATHE
- Next, scoot your heels as close as possible to the wall and feel the stretch, for most of us it will hurt so good. BREATHE
- Finally try taking a few steps away from the wall in this position and remember all the times your mother told you to sit up straight. BREATHE

To turn the above posture into a balanced poise for the **Smooth-Modern rhythms** (waltz, foxtrot, quickstep, international & American tango, Viennese waltz) take the ending position from above and move your full body weight slightly back to the front of your heel. We will add more to this later.

For the **Latin-American rhythms** (rumba, cha, jive, samba, mambo, west coast swing, swing, Argentine tango...) shift your full body weight slightly forward to the back of the ball of the foot.



Now practice walking forward and backward by yourself, recentering your weight over your supporting leg/foot with each weighted foot/leg change. You may wish to practice with a wall fairly close to one side so that you can concentrate on one item at a time and slowly build up your balancing skills.

#### Smooth-Modern Rhythm Forward Moving Exercise:

- Stand in the poise described above with your feet approximately hip distance apart, weight evenly distributed onto both feet.
- Transfer all of your weight to your right foot by shifting your full body weight slightly to your right. Regain your balance; use the wall to help stabilize you if needed.
- Bend your right knee and balance on your right foot. Shift your weight slightly back & forward to different parts of the foot until you find the smooth center of weight point (pictured above).
- With your right knee still bent, bring your left foot out from under your body in front of you making contact with the floor with the back of your heel. At the same time transfer the weight on your right foot from the back to the ball of the foot. Continue taking weight onto the left foot rolling from the heel to the smooth center of weight point and rolling the weight off the toes of your right foot.
- Bring your right leg/foot under your body without weight. This is called collecting.
- With your weight fully on your left foot regain your balance and center the weight on the smooth center of weight point.
- Repeat transferring weight from your left to your right foot. Please do not be discouraged if your balance goes to pieces at first as we have just given you about 20 different things to think about all at once. Trust us, with more practice the balance will come and you will feel an improvement on the dance floor.

#### Smooth-Modern Rhythm Backward Moving Exercise:

- Stand in the poise described above with your feet approximately hip distance apart, weight evenly distributed onto both feet.
- Transfer all of your weight to your left foot by shifting your full body weight slightly to your left..
- Bend your left knee and balance on your left foot. Shift your weight slightly back & forward to different parts of the foot until you find the smooth center of weight point.
- With your left knee still bent, bring your right foot back under your body reaching back with the big toe. When the toe makes contact with the floor transfer the weight from your left foot to your right by rolling the weight off the back of the left heel on onto the right toes to ball to front heel.
- Bring your left leg/foot under your body collecting without weight.
- With your weight fully on your right foot regain your balance and center the weight on the smooth center of weight point.
- Repeat transferring weight from your right to your left foot. Practice will help.

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*Next Month – Walking as a Couple & Latin-American Walking*