

In and Out Circles

By Barbara & Jim German

Have you watched ice skating performances? There's one act that is always a crowd-pleaser. It's where two people skate onto the ice from opposite sides, meet in the middle looking in opposite directions with one arm interlocked with each other and slowly begin to rotate. Another skater from each side enters and skates toward the center people hooking on the end. Now all four are rotating. Another pair of skaters and then another join the end of the line circling till a long line extends across the ice. The outside people are visibly moving faster and faster as the line gets longer and longer. The skaters on the end of the line are really traveling a long distance compared to the center two skaters. Then a lone skater enters the ice and starts coming up to speed to cover the distance necessary to hook on the end. This skater appears to have a very difficult time and everybody watches to see if he will make it. Just when it looks like the person will not make it, the last person in the line extends a hand and the skater grabs it and is able to gain the speed to cover the distance necessary to hook on the end. Now you see the line with the center two covering very little distance as they complete a circle and the outside two covering a lot of distance to keep the line straight. It's always enjoyable to watch the line form and see how much distance the outside people have to cover to keep up with the almost no distance traveled by the center two. You can pick any two people on the same side of the line to watch and see the difference in distance that each is covering. The people toward the outside of the circle will cover more distance and the people toward the center of the circle will cover less distance. The same is true in dancing!

When executing a turning figure, the person toward the inside of the circle will move less distance than the person toward the outside of the circle. If both partners were moving the same distance with each step, no turn would be accomplished. To achieve turn, one person will travel less distance. In dance, the amount of difference in distance traveled is small but the concept applies. Let's look at some turning figures and see how this works.

Using waltz rhythm and starting in closed dance position facing diagonal center, a left turn will have the man turning toward his left and end backing line of dance. If we drew a line on the floor to trace the steps taken by both the man and the woman, we would see that the man has moved a greater distance. The line he traveled is slightly larger than the line traveled by the lady. Therefore, the man is on the outside and the lady is on the inside of the circle. (The word "circle" is used even though the couple traveled only part of a distance around- more like an arc.) To accomplish the left turn, the man will initiate a slight right shoulder lead as he steps forward with his left foot indicating his intention to circle around the lady. The lady now knows she will be dancing on the inside of the circle. For the second half of the left turn, the man needs to inform the lady that she will travel the greater distance and move around him; thus the man will dance the inside of the circle. Starting in closed dance position facing reverse line of dance, *the man will step back a small step with his right foot and initiate a rotation* of his body toward the left. This action indicates to the lady that she will travel the greater distance and move around the man. The man will continue his body rotation to the left indicating to the lady to continue moving around him. On the last step, the man will close his right foot to left and stop his body rotation. The lady will feel the rotation stop and will close her left foot to her right foot in closed dance position. (As discussed in an earlier article, this position is the lady's home position.) Normally, the couple will end facing diagonal wall. The man dances the first measure on the outside of the circle and completes the figure by dancing the second measure on the inside of the circle.

In the Waltz figure Double Reverse, there are two rotations: one for the man and one for the lady. In the Double Reverse, the man moves around the lady then the lady moves around the man in one measure of music. (In the Left Turn, two measures of music were used. In the Double Reverse, only one measure of music is used.) Using waltz timing, the man takes two steps around the lady on beats 1 and 2, and the lady takes one step around the man on the & count of beat 2 then a crossing step on beat 3. Although there is body rotation throughout the figure, the man and the lady are not "moving around" each other at the same time. The lady's crossing step at the end allows her to continue a slight rotation returning to her home position.

The Wing from semi-closed position is another turning figure utilizing the concept of inside and outside of the circle. While the man takes only one step, the lady travels around the man with three steps. On beat one, the man steps forward and across leading the lady to initiate a left face movement around him. After step one, the man will continue his body rotation indicating to the lady to take two more steps around him to end in sidecar position. In this figure the man is on the inside and the lady is on the outside of the circle.

The Double Reverse Wing combines both the Double Reverse and Wing figures. The man is on the outside of the circle for beats one and two and on the inside for beats 3&. To end in wing position, the man continues slight body rotation to the left indicating to the lady to step forward on the & count to sidecar position.

Take a look at some turning figures and see who is on the inside and who is on the outside. Knowing who is on the inside and who is on the outside can reduce the problem of “getting into each other’s way”. Be aware of the figures where the couple represents the center two people on the ice. These figures, like the center two people on the ice, have the dancers moving on the same circle. The Outside Spin has this characteristic. Each dancer is moving around the other but both dancers are the same distance from a common center point between the partnership. Therefore, both the man and lady are moving on the same circle and around each other. These figures are generally described as rotational figures and not as turning figures.