

Oh My Aching Head

By Barbara & Jim German

Help or hinder. That is what the lady's head position can do to a figure. That wonderful head we carry around on top of our shoulders can assist the man's turn and make us look great or stop his body rotation and cause the figure to fall short of expectations.

Once again we start with looking at closed dance position, the lady's home position. Comfortably nestled into the man's right arm and looking to the left, her eyes are looking slightly above the crowd. The lady is prepared and waiting for the man's lead before beginning the dance. This is great - Three Step, Open Natural Turn, Back, Back/lock Back and the lady's head is still in home position (to her left) looking out over the man's right shoulder. The man's head also retains its home position looking left over the lady's right shoulder. Now, the man leads an Impetus to semi-closed position. Oops, her head can not stay left; the "nose over toes rule" jumps into play. So the lady's head will stay to the left for the first step then begin to turn right as the man leads the figure from closed to semi-closed position. The man's head is still to his left as the lady has changes her body position and slowly turns her head to the right. Good job and looking good too!

Who is responsible for the lady's head movement? Actually, both of you. As the man leads a head action, the lady needs to be sensitive to his lead and respond. Many times the man's body sway will guide the lady to open and close her head. Try this little exercise. With the couple in their closed dance position or home position, have the man stretch his right side. Remember men, our sway and stretch comes from the right foot up to the right shoulder; we do not lift our shoulders nor lower our left side. The lady should feel this movement both with the man's right side stretch and increased pressure from the heel of his right hand and want to turn her head to the right. Now, return to home position. The man will relax his right side stretch and present a level and balanced position to the lady. The lady should feel this change in the man's body position and also feel an even hand pressure on her back. This action by the man is the lead for the lady to return her head to home position. Home position or closed dance position is like home plate in baseball; we start from home and return to home as frequently as possible – perhaps to the cheering crowd.

From the Impetus to Semi-closed position, which changed the lady's head position from closed to semi-closed position, let's add the Chair and Slip. As the man takes the first step of the Chair, the lady will keep her head "open". Then, as the man slips his right foot back, the lady will feel the slipping action and thinking "nose over toes", she will return her head to home position while the man continues to keep his head to the left. No problem, we have been doing this forever and it feels so good.

So far in this article the head position discussion has been relatively simple to understand. Now, Let's look at the Whisk & Wing and bring into discussion the concept of **sidecar position**. Whisk. Starting in closed dance position facing diagonal wall, the man will step forward on his left foot followed by a side and slightly forward step with his right foot. As the man stretches his right side and crosses his left foot behind his right, the lady will feel a lead to turn her head to semi-closed position at the end of the Whisk. To start the Wing, the man will take his single step forward leading the lady to move across his body. Her goal is to return to closed dance position; however, the man's body rotation will lead her to cross in front of him and outside on his left side to sidemcar position. The big question... where does her head go as she moves across the man to sidemcar position? Where will the lady be looking when she has finished the Wing? **Home, Sweet Home** should come to mind and she **looks left** over the man's right shoulder again. The man has a strong body rotation in the wing action and very little footwork. The lady will help the man complete the figure by looking to her left. It will also help the couple finish the figure in closed dance position from the waist up and in sidemcar position from the waist down. This allows a path for the man to step forward outside the lady to start the next figure. If we continue with the wing figure, the lady will keep her head to the right looking over the man's left shoulder. If the lady keeps her head position to her left, it has been said that she looks like she has been hung out on a clothesline to dry. This look is eliminated if the lady thinks of getting to home and turning her head left over the man's right shoulder as she completes the wing. The man's stretching of his left side as he rotates his body will help the lady return her head to home position. The man will continue to keep his head left looking over the lady's right shoulder.

The Natural Hover Cross is a figure with interesting headwork. Starting in semi-closed position facing diagonal wall with the lady's head over her toes looking toward diagonal wall, the man will move across the line of dance in front of the lady creating an appearance that the lady is moving her head toward home dance position. As the man continues his movement and the lady's body turns to sidecar position, her head does not move very much but retains her home position. (The man's head is also in home position at this time.) The lady's body has moved under her head while her head movement has been very little; yet visually it appears to move from semi-closed to home dance position. Now we do the check, recover, and finish the figure to banjo position diagonal center. Again, the lady's body has moved under her head. The lady's head has retained its home position for the second measure. For illustration, if the man is facing more center at the end of the Hover Cross and the lady is looking at a point which is diagonal wall and line of dance. Now, the man initiates a Telemark to end in semi-closed position facing diagonal wall. The lady can execute the Telemark without taking her eyes away from the point she was looking at following the Hover Cross. Her body moved under her head. Her head retained its home position and ended in semi-closed position.

In a Natural Weave, we have seen lady's keeping their head in home position for both measures and we have seen lady's open their head to look opposite their direction of movement for the first measure and return their head to home position on the second measure. Both are correct and each will present a different look to the Natural Weave. When should the lady move her head? The answer depends on the man's desire for he should lead and communicate to the lady his desire. The man's lead comes from a right side body stretch. As he starts step two, he will stretch his right side creating pressure through his right arm into the heel of his right hand. The lady will feel this pressure and respond with a slight left side stretch to parallel the man and her head will incline to the right. Then as the man completes step three and moves into step four he will resolve the right side stretch. As the man resolves his right side stretch, the lady will feel the change in the man hand and she will resolve her left side stretch and return her head to home position. If the man does not present the lady with a right side stretch, then the lady will keep her head in home position. So that is how they make it look so neat.

While the man spends much of his dance time looking at the direction of his left hand, different looks for the couple can be created through the position of our heads. Let's do our best to assist the man. Thinking about all of this head action or lack of head action can give a girl a headache. But if we tend to keep our heads in home position until the man indicates otherwise through his lead or body stretch, then we will be doing our best to follow the man and look good.

Finally, it is very important to complement your partner when completing a dance. There is always something good to remember about each routine and a complement will encourage repetition of the good. We all like to receive praise. Happy dancing!