

Three Little Secrets
By Jim and Barbara German

We all enjoy watching a dance couple move effortlessly across the floor. Whether it is Round dancing or Social dancing, there are always a few couples that are able to express the ideals of dance and movement. What do these couples have in common; why do they move effortlessly than another? And what is their secret? And over the years much has been written on why some couples are more enjoyable to watch. A common element to all couples is the ability to move from figure to figure with ease and style. From the dance couple's point of view, three elements appear to be common. We have called these elements the "**Three Little Secrets**". What are these secrets and how do they apply to our dancing?

Secret # 1: The lady always attempts to retain closed dance position. If the man takes the lady out of dance position, she will return to it at the first possible step.

Secret # 2: In normal dance position, the lady will always change weight when her feet come together or close.

Secret # 3: When walking backward, the lady agrees to release the toe of her non-supporting foot with each step.

These three little secrets (or guarantees that the lady makes for the man) apply to waltz, fox trot, and quickstep rhythms.

It is nice for the man to be confident that ***the lady will maintain closed dance position or return to it at the earliest possible step -Secret # 1***. This means the man can concentrate more on leading the lady to other positions and then allow her to return to dance position. For instance, if the man were to commence a waltz box, he could follow it with an underarm action for the lady. The figures start facing wall in closed dance position and retain closed dance position until the man on step 5 of the box (measure two, left foot stepping side) raises his lead hand. At that point the lady's side step (right foot) will change slightly to end pointing more toward LOD than toward the man. The man has initiated an action to lead the lady out of dance position. With his lead, the lady has initiated or commenced a right face turn. On step 6, the man will close right foot to left as the lady takes a forward step under joined lead hand continuing a right face turn to end facing wall. Keeping lead hands joined (and with contact at the wrist), the man can indicate that he wants the lady to take a forward step as he steps forward. If the man did not indicate a forward step, the lady would continue turning right faced and take her right foot toward the man to return to dance position. [You can see this would be a problem with the man moving forward and the lady moving to her right.] As the man steps forward, he can relax the wrist contact. This action will inform the lady that he no longer desires her to stay in side-by-side position and she is to think of returning to dance position. The next two steps for the man are side right and close left to right. The lady's next two steps are forward. She will take a forward left with slight turn toward the man and forward again turning to face the man returning to dance position. It is also quite a nice look if the lady's body had returned to dance position but she delays the placement of her left hand on the man's right arm until late in the measure or into the first step of the next measure.

Another interesting figure is the Telemark. Starting the Telemark in closed dance position facing DC, at the end of step 2, the man is facing toward RLOD in dance position. On step 3, the man will be moving his left foot and left side (shoulder leading) toward DW. As he steps toward DW, he has moved out of dance position with respect to the lady. If the lady follows secret #1 with a strong desire to retain dance position, she will have turned strongly on step two and will step back on her right foot achieving dance position in CBMP. BINGO! - The Closed Telemark!

With Secret # 1 firmly in mind (the lady returning to dance position) we need to consider a Telemark to Semi. We now are aware the man needs to indicate to the lady a different ending on step 3. This can be accomplished by having the man place slight pressure from the heel of his right hand on the lady's back. One very nice way to achieve this hand pressure is to incorporate some right side stretch with step 3. This action will keep the lady's head in a semi or open position and indicate to her not to return to dance position.

Secret # 2 (*the lady will always change weight when her feet come together*) has interesting applications. It appears so simple something must be hidden. Well let's see. We are in closed dance position facing DC with the man thinking of a left turn. Since this is normal dance position and her feet are together, does the lady change her weight? How many times does she change weight? The man can solve this situation. He can change his weight to his left foot indicating to the lady to take weight on her right foot. Now the man can change weight to his right foot indicating to the lady to take weight on her left foot and lower into his right knee. With the lowering action, the lady will not change weight. Even the popular "apart point, together, touch" should include a lowering on the "together" step to obtain the "touch" (a closing of the feet with no weight change). If man does not lower, the lady would close her feet and change weight (left foot free for both) and the couple would be ready to execute a figure with same foot footwork. Thank goodness for the cuer! But we are okay in our lowered position with lead feet free for both and are ready to start the reverse turn. Looking at just part of the waltz action, the first step will be forward left commencing to rise. Step 2 will be forward right continuing to rise (this step ends side). And step 3 will bring the feet together in an up position. In this position, the lady will change weight to her right foot. Using this knowledge, and knowing the lady will change weight, the man can change his weight or not and lower into his supporting knee. If the man does change weight and lowers into his left knee, he can continue into measure two of the reverse turn. If the man does not change weight and lowers into his right knee, he can continue into a split-ronde.

Another example might be the change from Hinge to the Same Foot Lunge. Starting in Hinge position, as the man transfers his weight to the right foot he will have a body rise. This action will recover the lady to an up position with weight on her right foot. This up position will provide the lady with the first opportunity to obtain closed dance position with the man (secret #1). The lady will return to dance position bringing her feet together and transferring her weight from her right foot to her left foot (secret #2). The man can now swivel the lady to her right (taking her out of dance position) and lower into his left knee preparing to step sideways into the Same Foot Lunge.

The Change of Direction and Secret #2 can work well together. Facing DW in a lowered closed dance position with lead feet free, the man will take left foot forward on step 1. Step 2 is right foot forward and pointing toward LOD still down in the left knee. Step 3 transfers the man's weight from his left foot to his right foot retaining a down position in the right knee while drawing the left foot to the right. The lady will follow the man on step 2 and transfer weight to the left foot and retain the man's lowered position. The lady will also draw her right foot to her left foot but will not transfer weight since she is not in a normal up position.

Secret # 3 relates to walking. *When in normal dance position, the lady agrees to release the toe of the non-supporting foot when walking backwards.* This means the lady will release the toe of her left foot as she takes weight on the ball of the right foot. This assumes the man is taking a heel lead forward with his left foot. As the lady follows, she will step back to the toe of her right foot and release the toe of her left foot. The toe release assists in the transfer of weight to her right foot. This action is repeated on the next step with the release of the right toe. This important action presents to the man the feel of a very light and flowing lady - someone who is just a mere wisp in his arms. Should the lady not release her toe, she will retain some pressure and weight toward the man. This will prevent the man's fluid forward action and he will feel like he is dancing with a _____ (you choose: brick, mountain, etc.).

Now you know the three little secrets. Standardized figures and actions are to a great degree dependent on these three fundamentals. As we add figures and complexity to our dancing, we can appreciate more how these three secrets apply making our dancing more pleasurable both in feeling for the couple and watching for the audience.

A Bonus Secret to ponder:

As a man, it would be nicer to hear the words: "That was an interesting way of executing that figure" instead of the popular "What the **** are you doing?." This secret has not gained a lot of popularity yet, but I still have hope. Have fun dancing and remember the three (four) little secrets!