

GINGER'S THEME – Walking Backwards and in High Heels too!
By Jim and Barbara German

Smooth dancing is the ability to glide across the dance floor like you are on a cloud. What a dream and it can come true in the foxtrot, waltz and quickstep. The really neat thing about being the lady in the smooth dances is **all you have to do is walk**. Once a good dance position has been established, the lady can concentrate on her forward and backward walking steps. With the man leading, the lady has all the incentive she needs to execute a figure or routine. Sometimes we anticipate doing the next cued figure or “help” the man through the figure or start the figure first and actually lead the man. Most of the time this is really not necessary and takes away from our ability to glide across the floor. As Mickey Moore has been heard to say, “Brent likes me to dance in a slight fog.” Brent likes to lead and when the man leads and the lady responds, the couple looks better on the dance floor, and it feels better. The way the lady moves her legs and feet and responds to the action of the man’s body will create such exciting movements as the heel turn and double reverse. Really ladies, **we only need to walk, albeit backwards and in high heels**. There are a few things we do need to keep in mind:

THE REACH, PUSH, RELEASE & ROLL, AND COLLECT PATTERN.

Before looking at the backward walk, let’s look at the forward walk. The first step is actually a preparation step for the walk. Normally in Round Dancing the Introduction establishes the body movement or the preparation for the walking action. While the man’s left foot is doing the movement and the right foot is weighted, the right leg is slightly bent at the knee, providing both balance and space for the left leg to reach forward. (This means I must have lowered into my supporting leg at the end of the preceding measure.) My right leg provides the energy or PUSH. As the heel of my right foot begins to leave the floor, the heel of my left foot begins to make contact with the floor. As my right foot loses contact with the floor (RELEASE) as it moves from the heel to the toe, my left foot gains contact with the floor from the heel to the whole foot (ROLL). My body has moved over my left foot with a relaxed knee, my right foot has collected (COLLECT) or moved next to my left foot with the foot flat to the floor and unweighted. Here I am with my left foot weighted, my left knee bent or relaxed, and my right foot free ready to move forward. Watching a video in slow motion will show that this is how we walk. In dance, there is more emphasis on the walking movement since we are not swinging our arms to assist in the action and also for the man to present the lead to the lady.

Let’s now look at how the lady will walk backward. Since we only have to walk, we have lots of time to figure out how to walk (and we have been doing it for years). As with the forward walk, there is a preparation before the first step is taken. The man lowers into his right leg by bending his right knee slightly leading the lady to lower into her weighted (left) foot and release her right foot. **REACH!** Releasing the right foot implies moving the right foot back from the hip with the knee kept relaxed or slightly bent and having the toe of the right foot lightly touching the floor. Yes, we are bearing our “sole”. The man now has a space to move into. As he does this, his weight projects forward from the waist area and we can feel this movement with our body.

Now **PUSH!** From the weighted leg, this is the foot and the leg that provides the energy we need to move backwards, we propel ourselves {push not pull} backward extending or sliding the toe of our right foot backward until we feel the man begin to take weight on his free foot. This adds a couple of inches to the length of the step and gives a gliding appearance. There is almost no weight on this foot as yet, but it has made significant journey from the preparatory action the man took by lowering into his right leg.

RELEASE & ROLL! Take weight on the ball of the right foot. At the same time we are rolling and taking weight onto the ball of the free foot, we are releasing the toe of the weighted foot. You might be able to feel the drawing of a heel and perhaps hear the slide on the floor of the left as we continue rolling onto the back foot. Picture yourself standing on the ball of your right foot and the heel of your left – actually a whole foot is on the floor, but not on the same side of the body. By releasing the toe when backing up, we allow the man freedom of movement to come forward. Did you ever try to push a heavy piece of furniture across the floor? Takes a little energy. Now suppose you are “pushing” a lady across the dance floor – does it feel the same or is she light as a feather? That probably depends upon whether she releases the toe

of the foot as she completes the step or whether she is still anchored. Try it with your partner. Starting in loose close dance position, have the man walk forward while the lady tries to keep her toe in contact with the floor. After a few steps, release your toe as you continue to walk backwards. See how fast you seem to move? No longer will we hear the man's cry: "Let me move!"

COLLECT! Draw the left foot back beside the right foot parallel to the floor without weight to collect. Always a lady, we think, "legs together". What do you feel brushing – the thighs, knees, ankles or shoes? As we continue to feel the man's forward poise, we continue moving back from the hip until the toes is in light contact with the floor – bearing our "sole" again.

The pattern of reaching, pushing, rolling, and collecting is repeated for each backward step. Just think, Ginger (as in Fred and Ginger) took three backward steps as Fred lead the Three Step. The frequency and repetition of this action in just one routine makes it critical to get that gliding or floating action of the smooth dances. Now we ladies can all do Ginger's theme: "Walking backward and in high heels too!"

See you on the dance floor.