



Give Her Leg A Nudge

by Harold & Meredith Sears

How is a man to lead his partner? We are told to use hip rotation, upper-body rotation or side lead, side stretch or sway, and rise and fall as signals to the woman. A category of lead that might deserve extra consideration is the nudge. Off the dance floor, a nudge is traditionally a poke in the ribs, usually with the elbow. On the dance floor, our elbows are up and part of our toned frame. They are not available for poking. On the dance floor, a nudge is a gentle and subtle push with the foot, knee, thigh, and/or hip that triggers or leads a specific movement on the part of the woman. Of course, we are not suggesting that the man kick or knee the woman to make her go where he wants her to go. Surely Meredith would not countenance such a thing. But lead and follow is communication between two bodies, and a “little nudge” can be a surprisingly clear and comfortable signal.

Right Lunge and Contra Check —

Let's first think about the Right Lunge. Mostly, we do this in the Smooth rhythms such as Foxtrot, Waltz, and Tango. It's a one step figure, and we begin it in closed position with the trail feet free. The Right Lunge might be a one-step figure, but there is certainly more than one thing to do. First, the man lowers into his left leg, flexing his left knee. Of course, the woman lowers into her right leg. He steps side and forward between her feet onto his right foot, and the woman steps side and back left. He lowers into his right leg, rotates just a little to the left, and finally shifts his gaze right and looks at his partner (fondly).

Now, a brief warning: Men, we spend most of our time with our head left. We are looking up, but her right elbow or right hand might be in the bottom of our field of view. When you are told that you may “look at” your partner, we usually mean only that you may shift your gaze a little farther right, maybe over her right ear. Don't get in her face. Generally, we want to stay in closed position and maintain proper frame. Keep your torso up. Don't invade her space and push her over.

But what we really want to look at is that step between her feet.

The man's goal is to contact the inside of her left thigh with his right knee and to gently ease her leg out there. Give her leg that nudge. If the two of you step to the side independently, it is easy to take the step at slightly different moments or even to go in slightly different directions. We want to dance this figure together and to end the figure in a tight closed position.

The man's lead is not so much about telling the woman what figure to dance. She can hear the cues, too. Lead is about dancing those figures smoothly and together, about not tugging or pushing. It's about ease and comfort, and this little push with the leg says, "Let's take this step exactly here and at this particular rate." A nudge is a clear and direct statement. It's a good lead.

The Contra Check is another one-step figure, this time danced with the lead feet. In closed position, the man lowers into his right knee, begins left-face rotation, and slides his left foot forward. Of course, the woman is lowering and stepping back on her right, allowing her right toe to slip across the floor, but she is not stepping independently. The man's left thigh is actually pushing into her right thigh. Only when she feels the man stop and begin to change weight, will she stop that slipping foot movement and take weight herself. If the man doesn't provide this gentle pressure, if the woman doesn't wait, receive, and respond to that pressure, then you'll separate from each other, or he'll step on her toes or push her over—it'll be a mess. If you do communicate through this direct contact, then you'll stay together, and there'll be no surprises.

Rudolf Ronde and Throwing Over —

Traditionally (and per Roundalab), we are taught to use upperbody rotation both to lead the woman's right leg into a Rudolf Ronde and to "bowl" her left leg back in a Throwing Over, but we have also heard that the lead would be less ambiguous and more comfortable if we actually gave her leg a little nudge.

The Rudolf Ronde begins in closed position. The man lowers and steps forward on his right foot between the woman's feet rather like dancing a Chair, and she steps back on her left. As a part of this step, he might give a little tap to the inside of her right knee with his right knee, leading her to lift her right leg from the hip and ronde it clockwise. Certainly, he must do this with some care. If he rushes his step and she still has some

weight on her right, then the "tap" will leave a bruise, but if the timing is controlled—both take the step fully, and then tap after the slightest delay—then the man's lead is clear and direct and the woman's follow is automatic. The movement is crisp and sharp.

The tap only initiates the movement. Now we can use the upper-body rotation to fine-tune the ronde itself. The man should leave his left leg side and back and his right leg soft, but he can lift his left side to suggest something about the height of her ronde. And he can adjust the rate of his right-face rotation and his follow-thru, to lead the speed of her ronde.

Often, a Rudolph is danced over two counts, and the man's upper-body rotation will feel rather quick. But a slow Rudolph might extend over four beats or even more, and then his rotation needs to be slow and gradual.

We can also use a little nudge in the Throwaway Oversway. Usually, this figure incorporates a Promenade Sway, so in tight semi-closed position, we step side and forward on our lead feet. The man uses left sway to keep the woman's head open and to produce forward body poise. The man's right and the woman's left legs are tight together and extended back, pointing. Now, the man lifts, changes to right sway, rotates to the left, taps her left thigh with his right knee, and quickly initiates his lowering action. Finally, he completes his lowering, using all the available time. The sway change closes her head and shifts you from semi-closed to closed position. The rotation aims and the tap then sends her left foot straight back, exposing the sole of her foot to passers-by. Note that the tap is a gentle nudge; your trail legs are already in close contact.

Finally, the quick lowering prevents her from taking weight on her left foot as it passes under her body. (Theoretically, if the man delays the start of his lowering action until after she collects her left foot, then she will change weight and lower into a Hinge, rather than a Throwaway.)

So, give her leg a nudge. A man's lead is supposed to suggest to the woman what step or movement she might choose to dance and to suggest exactly when she might do it. A gentle push is a clear and comforting signal.

