

The “Art” of Leading

by Jeanne DeGeyter

For those of us who have been around the dance world a while, we’ve all met “Jack.” Jack only wants to dance with the best followers, and he even has some “favorite” followers, such as “Jill.” Jack believes that only these dancers equal his own dancing skills, thus making him “look good.” So he turns away the beginner dancers who he considers below his skill level.

But Jack does not understand that better followers compensate for his mistakes, while all the time smiling graciously through his untimely leads and false frame. And then there’s Jill! Well, Jack and Jill look great together!! They both know the same complicated patterns, same fancy footwork, even the same arm movements ... and the crowd applauds!!!

Poor Jack envisions himself as a “top dog.” He continues to ask the better dancers and his “favorite” followers to dance, because he thinks he “looks good,” and avoids the beginners who just don’t know the right tricks.

Dancers like Jack shield themselves from the pain of reality. If only better followers and those who learned the same patterns can follow you, you might consider the reality that your fundamental technique of leading could use some attention.

Dancing with better followers DOES allow you to work on the “art” of dancing--styling, footwork, and “playing” to the music. Dancing with less experienced dancers, or dancers from other areas, is the best way to develop the “art” of leading. Your weaknesses are obvious with a beginner. Therefore, ask yourself why a certain pattern or move did not work. When you determine the necessary changes and blend them into your dancing, you begin to grow.

If you overestimate your own ability, and abandon the pursuit of proper lead and frame technique, you will struggle in your attempt to move to the next level. Over time, without proper focus, your leading skills will gradually deteriorate, and you will find yourself relearning these skills you left behind.

If leaders only dance with better followers, or those who know the same patterns, they won’t develop their leading skills, because they won’t “need to.” Beginners require a GOOD lead—and, they ARE leadable. *You just have to be better at leading than they are at following.* (Yes, you have been challenged!) *Of course you can always just dance with Jill...she doesn’t mind doing the same patterns over and over and over and...*