

“Personalizing Your West Coast Swing Style”

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STYLE VERSUS TECHNIQUE

Most beginners chose to start dancing because they saw someone, who inspired them. Watching someone with great style and grace inspires most of us to become better dancers. Yet, beginners, in their eagerness tend to overlook the objectivity of technique and the subjectivity of style.

Many students, mostly ladies, frequently ask me about learning “style.” The Webster’s dictionary on my desk sums it up well: “STYLE (n) Individuality that is reflected in a person’s actions...a method or manner of performing.” When asked about styling, Barry Jones emphasizes the importance of learning your basic techniques first. He explains that the styling only comes after the basics are well-learned. A female student asked James Leyva recently about styling. He smiled and said, “It’s really difficult to teach, ‘style’ is what comes out from the person’s soul.”

The bottom line is that “Style” is unique to an individual and should be different for everyone.

ASSIMILATE & VARY, DON’T IMITATE

The latest, greatest “styles” of the Super Stars are often mimic’d by admiring dancers. It’s never difficult to spot the copycat stylist. Even a great dancer, who easily replicates the style and movements of another, without unique interpretation, is simply an imitation.

I suggest to my students, beginners to advanced--make a study of developing your own personal style—a creative process. Start with an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of your dance technique and ability to lead/follow a variety of dancers with varying “styles.” Evaluate your personality and performance skills. Absorb and understand the aspects of an admired style or styles which are becoming to your body and personality characteristics. Learn variations of footwork that fit within the structure of leadable West Coast Swing.

Then “Express Yourself.” Don’t be afraid to play, but beware of becoming so self-absorbed in your cute little self that you forget about your partner. “Styling” should not disrupt the flow of the dance, throw a partner off balance, or distract from the partnership on the floor. Then go back to your technique and evaluate any negative impact of your new styling adventures. “That’s just my style,” is a poor excuse for an inability to lead or follow.