Leading Ladies

Partner dancing can be fun. Learning the structure, patterns, and rhythm, can be very difficult but the foundation of any partner dance is simply about the connection between the leader and the follower. Richard Powers said this in his article about partnering, “Knowing many dance steps and figures is fun, but the true art of social dancing, and its greatest pleasures, lie in great partnering. The nonverbal lead-follow connection between partners is the essence of social dancing.” As you follow my lead while you read, I hope you will see, how very much, I agree. Through this writing I will try to encourage, inspire, and remind readers to respectfully, and simply, make a connection with someone on the dance floor.

A successful leader will first manage his own body movement, then invite the follower to either continue or change directions and always be ready to adapt. When a leader goes by these simple guidelines, even with two left feet, any partner dance will have a great connection. Both male and female dancers can be great leaders and followers but for the purpose of this essay I will be writing in terms of a male being the leader and a female being the follower.

To initiate any movement, a leader must first manage his own body movement, hopefully with confidence for clarity. Leading is not about making the follower do what he wants her to do, but it is about moving his own body in a way that invites the follower to respond accordingly. For example, while facing each other and keeping a connection through their hands, if the leader wants the follower to walk forward he would simply walk backwards. As he is moving his own body first, the follower might respond by walking forward. This way there is no pushing, pulling, or telling her what to do, just action and reaction.

Once the leader has taken that first step backwards to initiate the movement he can invite the follower to come with him by keeping the connection with his hands. She will feel him backing away and either she will accept his invitation by keeping the connection with her hands or decline his invitation by letting go or resisting in the opposite direction. I the case that she doesn’t accept his invitation it is not ok for the leader to somehow make her go where he want anyways. This is the leader’s chance to adapt.

Partner dances have very specific technique that comes with each different dance, but all great dancers are continually adapting and adjusting. In the case of leading the lady to walk forward, the leader might have a plan of action (hopefully) but many factors could change that course. She might need to take smaller steps, so he would adjust his. She might see something behind him and resist the invitation in order to protect them both. A leader that is good at leading the same person regularly with practice, such as his wife, can also be just as good at leading his grandmother or even a stranger if he is able to adjust.

As you can see, dancing the role of a leader is quite similar to leading anything else in life. A great leader in life takes action himself, respectfully encourages the follower(s) and humbly changes direction when a detour is required. I personally would like to see everyone learning dance steps and rhythm. In the mean-time if you use the simple guidelines: 1. Move self, 2. Invite, and 3. Adjust, your partner dancing will be enjoyed by many. I hope to see you all on the dance floor.

Works Cited

Powers, Richard. “Great Partnering.” *Stanford Dance*. Web. June 30, 2016.