

Developing Power and Control on the Dance Floor

There are three factors at work in the developing of power and control on the dance floor:

- 1) Balance (which we covered in a past series)
- 2) Source of power (starts with the use of the supporting leg and moves up to body projection)
- 3) Control (alternating body movement and leg movement)

BALANCE

We went into great detail on the development of balance in our "Balance - the Elusive Quality" series - which also provided some exercises to help improve this important aspect of dancing.

The essence of good balance lays on the premise of maintaining both a good straight vertical axis (where the spine is straight), and a good parallel alignment of the hips and shoulders with the dance floor. It also requires an awareness of your supporting leg and body column (which will ultimately become the foundation of your source of power).

SOURCE OF POWER

Power is created by an awareness of your supporting leg and body column, and a body projection towards a clear destination. Depending on the style of dancing, there are three main ways to create power for your movement:

1) Compression. This type of movement is used in dances like Samba, social six-count Foxtrot, and to some extent at the second half of the chase in Waltz, Quickstep and Slow Foxtrot. You start by compressing your supporting leg and forcing your knee to flex and spring back up (similar to the action of a pogo stick). Your body will travel like the letter "n" - it compresses down, goes back up, travels while up, and lowers at the arrival to the receiving leg.

2) Body Swing. This type of movement is used in dances like the Viennese Waltz, Waltz, Slow Foxtrot and Quickstep. Perfect example is the Hesitation step in the Waltz. You start by swinging your hips straight down and allow your supporting knee to flex while directing the action forward (similar to the action of pushing a child in a swing at the park). Your body will travel like the letter "u" - it swings down, travels while down through the knees, and rises as it arrives to the receiving leg.

3) Body Projection. Variations of this type of movement are used in dances like Rumba, Cha-Cha, Swing and Argentine Tango. With your supporting leg straight, compress your hip down slightly as you project both, the rib cage and receiving leg forward (imagine you are walking against the current in a river). You then, transfer the weight forward onto the projected receiving leg while holding onto the floor with the back trailing leg until the transfer is fully completed. Repeat the same process of body projection and weight transfer for every step.

CONTROL

As you improve your balance and develop more power in your dancing, you will find a need to control that power. Without the control to absorb your movement, you will constantly dance with your breaks on in order to keep your balance and timing.

The main key to controlling your power is to hold onto the floor with both feet as the body is moving. As you move off of your supporting leg, allow that leg to stretch and hold onto the floor until the body has arrived to the receiving leg. So, in essence the supporting leg has two jobs; it gives you the power to move when you are on it, and gives you the control to absorb that power after you move off of it.

Developing power in your dancing is a natural process and tends to grow as you practice and become familiar with your dance patterns. However, you can only develop as much power as you can absorb. Become aware of your free leg, stretch it and use it to hang onto the floor while your body is moving. Soon, power and control will be yours on the dance floor.

Happy dancing,

Blanche & Emilio

POWER AND CONTROL WITH TURNS.

The same three factors at work in maintaining power and control on the dance floor for linear movements, which we discussed in our previous issue, also applies to turning movements:

1. Balance
2. Source of power
3. Control

BALANCE

As indicated in our previous issue, the essence of good balance stands on the premise of maintaining both a good straight vertical axis (where the spine is straight), and a good parallel alignment of the hips and shoulders with the dance floor. It also requires an awareness of your supporting leg and body column.

SOURCE OF POWER AND SOURCE OF CONTROL

It is helpful to understand that in any turn there is an inside column and there is an outside column. For instance if you are turning right, your left column will be the outside column (it is further from the center of the turn), and the right column will be the inside column (it is closer to the center of the turn).

Depending on the type of turn you are doing, the source of power and the source of control will change:

Pivoting Actions. If you are doing pivoting actions where the body travels, your source of power for the turn will be the outside arm and column, and the source of control will be the inside column. Eg. You will swing your outside arm and column in a circling action towards the direction you wish to turn, while keeping the inside column still to absorb the power of the turn (make sure, however, the foot of your supporting inside column rotates with the turn).

Spinning Actions. If you are doing spinning actions where the body turns in place, your inside column will provide the power, and the outside column will provide the control. Eg. You will pull back the inside shoulder and column to initiate the turn while dragging the outside leg and column to provide control for the turn.

THREE COUNT TURN EXERCISE

This is a good exercise to experience the use of your columns for power and control. Basically, you'll keep your feet side by side and turn one-half turn at a time. You'll use the outside column to provide the power and the inside column to provide the control.

Stand straight on your left leg and point the right leg to your side. Stretch both arms outwards to each side. Picture a stationary pole on your right side and hold onto it with your right hand.

Start turning to the right by transferring weight to your right leg and column and swinging your left arm and column around to provide power for your turn (keep your right column straight and your right hand holding onto the pole).

During the middle of your turn (one-half turn to the right), take hold of the pole with your left hand as you start transferring weight onto your left leg and column (at this point you are facing the pole with feet side by side, weight centered between your feet and both hands holding onto the pole).

Continue your right turn by transferring the weight onto your left leg and releasing your right hand from the pole. Keeping your left hand holding onto the pole, let the right arm stretch slowly outwards to the right as you transfer your weight to your right leg and complete the second half of your right turn.

You are now standing straight on your right leg with your left leg pointing outwards towards the left. Your arms are stretched outwards with the left hand holding onto the pole. You are facing the same direction as when you started.

You can repeat the same process turning to the left. As you get more comfortable allow the turn to be more continuous. Make sure your balance is on the ball of the turning (supporting) foot during the turns.

The more you do this exercise, you will notice that you can put as much power as you want with your outside arm and column because your inside arm and column will absorb the momentum in the middle of the turn and allow you to complete the second half of the turn with ease and control.

Mastering power and control in turns is a matter of maintaining your supporting leg and body column straight, and being aware of which body column is giving you the power, and which one is giving you the control. And like, any other skill you want to master, you will need to practice.

Happy dancing,
Blanche & Emilio

Next Issue: How to Become a Great Leader on the Dance Floor

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Blanche & Emilio Librero have been operating their own successful School in Tampa, Florida, and producing high quality instructional videos since 1979. They are the creators of the best selling series "How to Become a Good Dancer".

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