

SPEAKING OF DANCING...

The Car with Two Steering Wheels

by Gigi Jensen

I have a car that my husband and I can steer at the same time. Doesn't really work well, though. We get to traveling down the line of dance and... crash.

Dancing with partners is a skill that's learned. That holds true whether you're dancing as a couple, trading partners in a square, or dancing in a line holding hands. We all move to our own rhythms so how do we dance together well? Collaboration is the key. Our willingness to dance in the same space at the same time requires some clear rules.

The first rule is: Dance with a generous heart. The Argentine dance master, Juan Carlos Copes, repeatedly said to dance "with one heart, four legs." In my experience that means to offer the best of your dance abilities as a gift to the moment rather than as an obligation; to dance with others rather than in spite of them.

The second rule: Divide the partnering duties. You do your part; I'll do mine. If you're doing a partner dance that requires improvisation, one of you takes the lead. No two steering wheels allowed. That, however, doesn't mean dance domination.

It's all about making the invitation and accepting it. The leader chooses the movements using the space available and managing speed of travel as the music dictates. It's also the responsibility of a leader to ensure the safety of the couple and that of the other couples sharing the social dance floor.

It's the leader's responsibility to ask the partner to do movements that are logical. Sometimes the follower doesn't accept and that could be for a few reasons. Maybe it's due to lack of familiarity with that dance, or the leader doesn't know very well how to make the invitation. If either partner is just being difficult, they'd do better to stay seated or find other partners.

Let the leader lead. It's a hard job. That being said, the follower needs to help make that experience a good one. If both give each other the time and space to contribute, the moment is so



satisfying - a conversation rather than a monologue. Usually that means I move when it's time and wait in place when not.

"Anticipate, but don't expect," a swing teacher once told me. That goes for all parties involved.

I was lucky to have had a teacher that taught

the art of allowing your partner time to shine.

"¡Lúzcate!" (It's your moment to shine!) A generous partner is always in great demand.

How does this apply to group dancing? Square dancing requires everyone being in the right place at the right time doing pretty much the same thing. Otherwise, it's a scramble. Contra dancing requires going in the correct direction or you end up switching partners (or not) when you shouldn't. More scrambling ensues.

What about dancing in a line? Now you have three partners: one on either side and the person leading the line. Yes, you have the predictability of the choreography, but you are still responsible for finding your space without taking away your partners', doing your own dancing, and making sure the others have a chance to enjoy the moment and the music. "Are you here to dance or to talk?" is a question you should never have to be asked when dancing with others. As for the person at the head of the line or in the center, you have to pay attention to them, to follow their lead, if you will.

The joy of dancing with others deserves giving your partners their just due. I dance a variety of dance genres - some better; others barely. I choose to spend my energy on Argentine tango. For me, it's the dance that offers "...a conversation of the feet," as my teacher said. I like dancing in a community, too, and that's now grown. Investing the time to share dance with others while respecting the rules of the road is a win-win for all.

I'd love to hear from you with comments, concerns, questions, or suggestions about future topics: dance@tangoandmoredance.com.