

Street Swing Partner Dance

Intro to Street Swing
together and apart, 'round and 'round, and away we go

The Play Circle – Why (Purpose), What (Principles), How (Practice)*
Connecting dance and daily life, swing and the street.

Why Purpose

Engage life as play.

Play is defined as **imaginative interaction**.

Play is an attitude rather than an activity.

Emphasize process over performance.

What Principles

Swing In the midst of life filled with multiple options, discover **connections**.

For dance, **incorporate** different styles.

Street In the midst of life defined by change increasing exponentially, look beyond technical solutions to **adaptive** solutions.

For dance, employ **improvisation**.

Partner In the midst of life characterized by changing roles, recognize **interdependence** and influence the interaction.

For dance, engage in greater **mutuality**.

Dance In the midst of life bombarded with competing messages, tune into the rhythms of life and **interpret** accordingly.

For dance, let the music **guide** you on what to do.

How Practice

Arthur Murray meets Contra Folk in the Google Age.

Arthur Murray – Stride and glide through life centered and collected.

Contra Folk – Embrace natural rhythms of life.

Yin and Yang

Circle of existence

Life as a journey

Google Age – Intuitive

Live your life with imagination and improvisation.

Recapture the spirit of Jazz Dance in the Ragtime Era for the Google Age.

*Adaptation of [Simon Sinek - The Golden Circle - TedTalks 2009 - YouTube](#)

Prose Poetry 28

Creative Tension

[The following poems are reprinted from the Dancing chapter of the booklet Creative Tension: Men and Women at the Crossroads self-published by the author in 1995.]

Learning to Dance

Having turned 40 years old in 1993, I resolved to spend 1994 writing poetry and learning to dance. I wanted to learn as many different kinds of dance as possible and then figure out which ones suited me best. I wished for the various beats and rhythms and movements to become part of the flow of my life. I desired to experience what it is like to dance with a variety of women. I hoped to prove to myself that it is possible for a man over 40 to become poetry in motion.

Go Easy

When I first started ballroom dancing, I clasped the woman's right hand with my left in such a way that some complained my grip felt like a vise. With more experience, I now offer my palm to my partner and open my hand so that others compliment my motion as like a hinge.

New Start

She thought she remembered the difference between a fox trot and a waltz but was not quite sure. After all, it had been a long time. she danced while she was young, but when she got married her husband was not interested and so they did not. Then rock and roll came onto the scene, and most of the ballrooms closed. Her husband died two years earlier, and she left the small town where

she had lived her whole life and moved to the city to be closer to children. She found a new job but kept her old house in order to give herself time to determine if this is what she really wanted to do. As the teacher explained the rhythms and steps, it all came back to her, and she moved with a nice slow-slow-quick-quick through the fox trot and a smooth one-two-three for the waltz.

Safe Place

Smoke swirled up from the Virginia Slims cigarette lightly positioned in the hand of a woman sitting across from me. She looked around at the bar scene surrounding us and related how she used to venture into this crowd alone. Now she refuses to enter unaccompanied, for she has given up on that kind of singles life. Instead, she dances the fox trot, waltz, East Coast swing, jitterbug, mambo, cha-cha, rumba, and tango at the studio. The instructor treats her with courtesy and respect, and for an hour at a time she can leave the outside world behind. Arthur Murray for her has become a safe place.

Slow-Slow-Quick-Quick

A middle-aged woman took me by the hand out onto the floor and told me she was going to teach the two step to me. Previous to this, she recounted how she and her husband had been married thirty years and up until two years previous had never done any dancing. She asked him to take country western lessons. He said he would if she'd go bear hunting with him. It was one of the best deals they had made with each other, she remarked with a smile. Now her husband had gotten so good, she added, that many of the women wanted to dance with him. As we moved ahead in the line of dance, she kept me on the beat by repeating, "Slow-slow-quick-quick." After a few trips around the floor, she complimented me for catching on so fast and told me I possessed the ability to do well. Then she urged me to keep coming back by saying, "There aren't enough men to go around, and you'd be able to dance with all the women you want."

It Takes Two

She wore a full skirt to the last lesson in the country western dance class. She wanted to do circles out of the cape position and make her dress twirl. We had not covered that move in any session, but I had watched a video on the Texas two step and wanted to do my part. When we were given time to practice on our own, we traveled around the floor with her skirt flying. She beamed and said, "Isn't this fun?" Afterwards the female instructor offered her observation to the male instructor who in turn related it to us. I was being concrete sequential, and my partner abstract random. All I knew at the time was that I was counting, and she was twirling.

Texan

As the country band played, a man leaned over and announced in a southern draw, "Watch this!" He strode towards the bar where a woman wearing tight jeans was sitting. He interrupted her conversation with two other men and told her he liked the two step. She replied that she preferred the swing, but would be willing to learn. He ushered her onto the floor for the next set, placed the middle finger of his right hand through a belt loop above her left hip, and firmly clasped her right hand with his left. While the band played God Bless Texas, he swaggered around the floor with her in tow. When he returned to the table, he picked up his beer and then asked, "Didya see that?"

A Wish

Three women nursed their drinks while admiring a tall man – in a cowboy hat and black boots, with wide shoulders and narrow hips, a friendly smile and an easy gait – lead his partner around the floor in a traveling trip step. One said, "I wish I had a hub!" "Don't we all?" another added.

Eyes of the Soul

As I held her hands during the first sacred dance at the religious retreat, I looked deep into her eyes and saw them darting with fear. Her eyes suggested a question being formed – "Can I trust this man to behold my heart and soul?" When I returned her gaze during the later sacred dances,

I noticed a difference as they began to sparkle with joy.
Her eyes told me the story of her life –
distrust turned to trust, and fear turned to joy.

Spinning

Three-quarter circles, show turns, figure eights, Gypsy turns, California turns, star circles, and Alabama turns all propelled me round and round in a lively evening of Contra dancing. When I went hip to hip with my partner and looked her in the eye in an otherwise closed dance position, we turned faster and faster. As we rotated rapidly, it seemed as if we were standing still and the room was spinning around us.

Keep Going

A caller yelled out the steps to a Romanian folk dance. I listened for the patterns of multiple steps and grapevines. A basket weave hold tied the circle of dancers together. I sensed the energy surge through me from the hands of others. The afternoon was spent learning several folk dances. My mind was spinning trying to keep the sequences straight. The evening featured a live band of various instruments. My body flew around the floor as part of a human chain. After midnight the party moved to a private home. I wanted to forget about time and dance the whole night. Someone asked how long everyone wanted to keep going. I saw the leader reply with a grin, "We can rest in the grave."

Self-conscious

His wife asked him to take dance instruction with her, and, being a good sport, he agreed to four group lessons.

The instructor had been teaching dance for forty years and was reputed to have a knack for helping men to feel more comfortable engaging in this sport. He contended that it was an old wives' tale that men can't dance concocted by someone who didn't know much about dancing. The worst thing a wife can do, he argued, is to take her man to a dance with the promise to show him how and with the assurance that he will somehow be able to feel the music and move into the steps. A man doesn't want to look foolish in front of other people and will want to go home, he countered. With some basic mechanics like counting, steps, and position, a man and woman can move into various dance forms, he offered.

The beginning student slowly but surely caught on to finding the beat, moving his feet in time with the music, and holding his wife in dance position. Still at break time, he acknowledged to a woman not his partner that he felt like Wally in one particular episode of the television show Leave It to Beaver taking dance lessons for the first time.

Rock and Roll Is Here to Stay

As a single parent she attended Little League games, assisted in leading a Cub Scout den, and conducted the children's choir at church. As a manager in a government agency, she oversaw several departments, supervised a number of workers, and handled a sizeable budget. She and I ended up dancing together in a country western dance class. Actually, she desired to take the ballroom class directly before that, but ball games were scheduled then and she took the session that time allowed. At the end, I gave her my phone number and told her if she would like to go dancing to let me know. She suggested '50s and '60s rock and roll. We did the East Coast swing, disco, jitterbug, and individual freestyle, but she kept asking for the partner freestyle swing I showed her beforehand. As hard as I could dance, she never seemed to tire. For four hours on a Saturday night, she forgot about all her responsibilities and rocked to the music she grew up on as a teenager.

What Can I Say?

First, she asked me which college I was attending. When I told her I graduated in 1975, she accused me of lying. Then she exuded that our swing dance made her feel like she was riding the twister at an amusement park. In response to further questions, I admitted to being a Norwegian Lutheran. Evidently, she didn't hold that against me, for she breathlessly called me a flamboyant dancer and exclaimed that she felt like she had died and gone to heaven.

Strut Your Stuff

The evening of '20s to '40s swing music wore on, the women were in short supply, and I sat out more dances than I wanted. Then with the floor clearing out, I met a woman who looked into my eyes and I looked into hers. We weren't Fred and Ginger, but for those moments on the dance floor we permitted ourselves to think we were. We forgot about the regular fox trot moves and glided around the floor doing turns, spins, circles, and other movement with an elan that seemed to make time stand still. Some looked at us wondering what we were doing, while others gazed with an expression that suggested they wished they could cut loose. The band finished playing, we lingered together, and then parted company into the night. I left for home under a full moon.

Compliment

After finishing a lively swing dance, a woman smiled at me and said, "You know what? You're crazy."

Bunny Hop

Jumping around on one foot is not what I had planned for Easter evening. Feeling left out with no family gathering, I decided to dance to rock and roll. Running around the first part of the night, I asked women my age to dance. Kicking up their feet freestyle only lasted so long, and only one wanted to swing. Forming circles, I joined college students without partners as the band played harder. Throwing caution to the wind, I entered the circle first on one left, then the other. Following me, others tried the same step, some successfully, others not. Growing reckless I balanced on one foot and leaped over and leaped around. Greeting me with high fives were the men and with smiles the women. Doing my own version of the bunny hop made the day turn out alright after all.

Hooked

I have a confession to make – I've become a dance junkie. I've even joined a group called Cindy's Swingers made up of other dance junkies who can't get enough swing. I suppose it had to happen sooner or later, getting high on swing and then becoming addicted – always going to one more dance and developing one more move. I still hold down my day job, but try not to allow it to interfere with my night life.

Ask a Man

Four hundred men and women crowded into a hall for a singles dance. Towards the end of the evening, I told one woman that I observed her line dancing with other women during the break. She responded that she liked this form of expression because then she did not have to wait for a man to ask her to dance. I asked her why she did not ask men to dance. She confessed to fear. I asked of what. She said they might decline. I told her that more than one woman said "no" to my offers. We danced several numbers. During a polka, I admitted to being unsure of the hop step and asked her to lead. She took me on a promenade. At the end, I told her I thought men and women would be better off if women also would ask men to dance.

Snowball in Summertime

As the band played In the Good Old Summertime, two lines moved towards the stage where men and women met to dance the waltz.

In this snowball mixer I joined with one woman and then another almost a generation older than me who had been dancing since their days of youth.

Some of them sang along with the music, while almost all wore a smile on their face as the Happy Harmony combo kept the good times coming.

Making the Most of Life

At the age of 75, she may have lost a step or two, but not her zest for dancing. She came and took my hand and ushered me onto the floor for a fox trot. She hated to sit out and, if there were no men available, she danced with women. When I asked her how much dancing she had been doing, she told me of one place on Friday evening, another on Saturday night, then the old time dance on a Sunday afternoon, and to keep in practice she turned the radio on to her favorite station during the week and swayed to the music. Eleven years earlier her husband died, and she learned to drive. Other women now depended on her for rides to the dances. She left me with these words: "Life is what you make of it."

Hanger Dance

Most of the dancers wore clothing of WWII vintage at a special big band dance at an airfield hanger otherwise housing old fighter planes. One woman came attired in a brightly colored flowery dress, a fur stole draped over her shoulder, and a mink hat with black netting. She wanted to do the swing to the songs she remembered from early childhood. It soon became evident that she could out dance most women half her age, for she danced like she was celebrating D-Day all over again. When we sought to catch our breath between songs and considered sitting down, the band leader announced Bugle Boy of Company C as the next number, and she insisted that we stay on the floor. Later we did the Charleston together and then I followed her in line for the Bunny Hop. As we flew around the floor doing the swing that evening, I imagined myself flying back in time to a time before my time of those heady big band days.

Dance Partner

She handed her card to me and told me to call her when I was next planning to come into town for dancing. I did just that the next week and so began a partnership of dancing a high energy swing to '50s & '60s rock and roll, '20s to '40s big band, rhythm and blues, and occasionally Cajun, as well as old time. We disregarded the conventional step patterns and regarded improvisation as the norm. Between us we knew many of the arm and body moves and picked up more as we went along. I couldn't possibly think of a better way to spend Friday and Saturday nights.

Swirl

She ran towards me, jumped up, wrapped her feet around my waist, and leaped back with her arms stretched out in back of her head. I turned around faster and faster as she glided just above the floor. Onlookers yelled and clapped. Then I took her hands and lifted her up. She gained her feet, grinned at me, and went into an underarm turn.

Firefighters' Ball

A retired firefighter greeted us as we walked in the door of the ballroom. The local fire department was celebrating their 50th anniversary. While the '50s & '60s rock and roll band played Great Balls of Fire, we danced the swing hot and heavy, lean and loose. As we walked off the floor at the end of the evening, I whispered into her ear that we had torched the place.