

LEVEL OF DANCES

When Line dancing was in its infancy, the words 'Watch me' or 'Follow me' became almost by-words. Dance scripts were like Gold dust.

One could have been forgiven into thinking when being taught Line dancing in those early days that there wasn't all that many dances going around-maybe 50 or a 100 at most. In those days ignorance was truly bliss.

Then the dances sheets started to flow more freely - and more 'new' dances followed. It was then that it was started to be noticed that the words 'Easy', 'Tricky', 'Difficult', 'Hard' that used describe the dance on those early dance sheets were been replaced by 'Beginner', 'Intermediate' and 'Advanced'. It is not known how, where or why these changes came about or who even instigated them... but they have now been linked to Line dancing for over a decade.

As time progressed and more and more dances were being choreographed it was becoming evident that a number of dances with more complex step combinations were being introduced and levelled at one of the three 'new' levels.

On not so close examination it could be found that a 'Beginner' dance was far too complex for that Level and would be more suited to say the Intermediate dancer - and so on and so forth. In a number of cases the reason for these anomalies could have been that the Choreographer mistook their own abilities for the abilities of the dancer for which the dance was aimed at. It could have been that when the dances were taught, there were no Levels attached and so an Instructor (rightly or wrongly) tagged one on. Whatever the reason, the problem began to escalate when both Choreographers and Instructors alike saw a dance with similar (?) steps in any one of the Levels and so followed suit.

The problem did not go unnoticed and to try and combat the increasing complexity and diversity of the dances more Levels evolved - 'Lower Beginner', 'Upper Beginner', 'Beginner/Intermediate', 'Lower Intermediate', 'Upper Intermediate', 'Intermediate Advanced'.. And more recently, the term 'Improver' has appeared. This term seems to be intended for 'somewhere' (sic) in between Beginner and Intermediate (possibly replacing the Beginner/Intermediate level). The majority of dancers strive to improve - no matter what level they are at.

... But again the CONTENT... the FORMULA of those 'Levels' were - missing..... and the problems only got worse -and to a high degree appear to be getting worse as each month progresses.

The levels also don't contain and 'upper' or 'lower', because given time those 'categories' which are used in an ad-lib fashion by Choreographers will become the norm for journals, competitions and the like. In time they could no doubt metamorphosis into their own 'level' - and thus, creating even more confusion. These phrases are without substance and are, at most, an interpretation of an individuals perception at that precise moment in time. And by that thought, can change dramatically with each continuing creation.

For a long time I, along with many others have come across a dances labelled 'Novice'. All these dances have been choreographed by very well known, high profiled people. Two of the dances contained full turns (one of those in 'one count') whilst between them - a hitched ¼ turn, Coaster Step and Vaudevilles - one even contained 'Applejacks'. To add to the confusion, there are now also more and more Competitions that include the term 'Novice'. On inspection of some of the dances chosen it is quite apparent that the use of the term within competitions must mean when someone is a 'novice' or 'newcomer' to those particular eventsand not to the general level of dance experience. Though it easy to see why both dancers and Instructors can become confused.

At the end of the day, the levels placed on the dance script should reflect an educated and accurate description - not some fanciful idea of the choreographers own 'level of experience' (?).

I have been to Countries and learnt a 'Beginner' dance, a dance that would strike more than fear into the most experienced Intermediate dancer in another Country. I've been to one side of a Country

where the common 'shuffle' is the order of the day for a Beginner dance. Whereas on the other side of the Country if the dance doesn't have at least two full turns in it then it would no good as a Beginner dance and wouldn't even merit a second glance.

Prior to compiling these Level and over an 8 month period between October 2002 and late May 2003 a number of Organisations (14 in all) were contacted. Each were asked if they had some form of structure that they used as benchmarks or guidelines for each of the existing levels within Line dancing. Only three replies were forthcoming - in one I was sent four dance sheets - Beginner, Beginner/Intermediate, Intermediate and Advanced and nothing else. Another sent a reply that contained three lines for each of the main levels and the final one - an application form for membership and a covering letter stating that they could only make a reply to my request if I were a member of the Organisation.

Obviously something was lost during the communication.

An Instructor wishes to start classes for the absolute Beginner.. where do they begin to look for dances. You can't always rely on other Instructors to give you the adequate information. You have to rely on common sense most of the time.. because even though you are searching through the vast amount of 'Beginner' dances you come across dances that are more suited to a circus acrobat or a Ballerina. More confusion.

The Present -

Now some Organisations (as mentioned earlier) or 'Companies' will point firmly at a need for the continual training of Instructors. There is a great deal of merit in what they say... there is also a great deal of self help available which could be either used in conjunction with the training or as a 'stand alone' issue. But unless there is some form of structured levels within Line dancing the problems that have been mentioned will not disappear with 'extra tuition'.

And who will 'train' the Choreographers - taking away the assumption, that a great number of people seem to hold that 'All Choreographers must be Instructors'. Issue could certainly be taken with some of the phrasing and improper dissection of standard Latin and Ballroom techniques and terminology even by 'well established and respected Choreographers' and maybe this area should be addressed more sooner than later - but that is not for this forum.

Please remember, these Levels are not written in 'tablets of stone'. They are certainly not 'the cure for all ills', they cannot and should not replace any formal (or other) training that the Instructor may require. These Levels will be a tool - and one of many that should be used in conjunction with the expertise of the Instructor. Instructors must (and quite often do) realise that even within each level there are levels of competence which the dancer MUST be taught. Choreographers too must realise the same and should not always create their dances for those who have attained that highest pinnacle of each main level.

You know the old saying.. 'they were all singing from the same sheet'.... Well, that not only means the Choreographers and Instructors but also the Organisations, Web sites, Magazines and journals. Now, you have at least something to work on - so that EVERYBODY can be of one voice.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

The terminology used is based on European phrasing. And no disrespect is either shown or given to other countries outside of Europe where different terminology is frequently used.

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