

## Social Dance Etiquette: A Guide for Beginners, and a Reminder For the Rest

### Introduction

Going to your first social dance can be daunting. The accompanying guide “How to Prepare for a Social Dance” is a long read giving end to end instruction to beginners, to build confidence and dispel the fear factor.

Good etiquette on the dance floor is something that brings together people from all around the world and makes them want to dance time and time again. Bad etiquette can put some people off dancing with a particular individual, or make an individual feel excluded. Both of which have played their part in contributing to declining numbers at social dances over the past 50 years. This guide gives the basic etiquette, which has been taught in class, but is consolidated here.

The following are points to observe out of general courtesy to your fellow dancers, and yourself:

### When You Arrive:

- Aim to arrive at least 15 minutes before the first dance – these events start promptly and you need to change your shoes, warm up, say hello, pay for your ticket, use the bathroom, skim your crib, browse the shop, etc. etc.

### Choosing Partners:

- **Anybody can ask anybody else to dance**, irrespective of gender.
- It is absolutely OK for two women to dance together, two men to dance together, or a mixed-gender couple to dance together (however you identify). The important thing is that you are dancing and having fun.
- **Don't “book up” partners in advance**, with the possible exception of the first and last dance you should be available for *anyone* to ask you to dance, including beginners and strangers. Remember, they might not know anyone at the dance and appreciate a friendly face.
- In those awkward instances where you have a partner for this dance and someone asks you to dance, offer them the next dance.
- **Avoid dancing with the same people all the time**. The idea with social dancing is to change partners every dance, and to meet new people. Yes, you want to dance with your friends or classmates but there are plenty of other people in the hall to dance with too.
- If you don't want to do a particular dance, leave the room after the previous dance has ended and come back in once the recap has been given. Everyone has a “loo-break” dance, either because they don't know, or don't like the dance – or simply want a rest. Leaving the room avoids the awkward “they asked me so I must dance” feeling.
- **It's OK to say “No Thank You”** if someone asks you to dance. Better if you can give them a reason – or ask them for the dance afterwards. Especially if you're injured, stop dancing and rest.
- **Don't pressure a beginner** to do a dance they don't know. Gently encourage, with the offer to help them round.
- **If you are a regular at a particular dance group and see a newcomer, make the effort to have a dance with them**. Include them and encourage them to dance. This includes both beginners and anybody the band brought with them for company on the drive down. They came a long way and don't want to be sitting out.

### Forming Up Sets

- **Wait for the MC to announce the dance/say “please make up sets”** before coming onto the dance floor with your partner. The musicians usually play 8 or so bars of the lead tune whilst you are doing so. It is bad form to try and rush the MC/musicians by forming up early. They may have a valid reason for the delay.
- **Don't push in at the top of the lines or in the middle** – especially not after the sets have been counted. Go to the bottom, regardless of your experience level and age.

- Once the lines have been counted, and before the recap, spread the sets out down the hall to ensure everyone has space to dance and the gaps between sets are obvious.
- Similarly, check your set widths and find your markers on the walls beyond to keep the set width the same during the whole dance.

### Counting Sets

- If you find yourself at the very top of the hall in top man's place, remember to count down the lines – even if it looks obvious. You can take your partner with you for moral support but it isn't their job, or anyone else's, to make sure the sets are complete. Also, remember to count yourself as '1'...
- If the lines have been counted and are complete, 1<sup>st</sup> man will signal to the MC by raising both arms in an X shape above their head (I don't know why, but it works, and is easier to see from a distance than a thumbs up). Don't try to join a line that has been marked complete.
- If the lines have been counted and are complete, 1<sup>st</sup> man will signal to the MC the number of couples required using the fingers on one hand. This is your cue to get in quick (with a partner of course).

### During the Recap

- **Do listen to the recap. Don't talk over it or let your partner talk over it.** Remember some people are actually learning entirely from that recap. Others need it as revision. So do you.
- **Don't try to recap to your partner off your crib 8 bars ahead of the MC.** The MC will tell everybody at once much more clearly than you can.
- **Don't "Tutt" or gasp** if an inexperienced MC makes a mistake, or uses non-RSCDS terminology. They're probably nervous and need encouragement. Most MCs aren't teachers, but they are voluntarily giving up their dancing that night. Their teacher may even be in the hall taking notes to help them learn later – you don't need to comment.

### During the Dance

- If you're not dancing (e.g. because you're 4<sup>th</sup>, or standing couple), still **pay attention to the dance**. Think of it as a visual recap for when it's your turn. Practice counting bars if you need to.
- If you are the standing couple **Don't move, Don't Narrow or Widen the Set!** The 4<sup>th</sup>, or standing couple are essential in the dance as width markers for the whole set – or even the whole hall! Particularly in figures such as allemandes, promenades and circles, which aren't danced along the lines, the dancers need to know where to get back to.
- **If you are the standing couple. Stand!** I have seen beginners, in both classes and at dances, be tempted to sit down (on the floor or on a chair) if they are either tired or bored. Doing this is discourteous to the dancing couples and also displays a lack of readiness and stamina in yourself.
- **Look at and Smile at your partner**, or the person you are approaching if not your partner. Not only will you get visual clues to make your dancing better and to phrase the dancing better but it's also friendly and polite.

### After Each Dance

- Quickly thank your partner.
- Quickly thank those in your set who helped you round if you needed it

It is noted in some dance groups, particularly in Russia and other places abroad, it has become part of the local etiquette for the man to escort his partner off the dance floor back to her seat. This is not the case everywhere, and in many parts of the UK is consigned to demonstration groups, not social dances.

- If this is your tradition, please be aware it doesn't happen everywhere. You may have to compromise by simply escorting them the length of 1 set – and be prepared to explain your tradition to every partner that evening!
- If this is your partner's tradition, please respect that. If you wish to go somewhere else in the room, ask them to escort you there, or for just a short distance.

### **At the Interval**

- Join in the applause to show your appreciation for the musician and MC.
- If the interval has refreshment or nibbles laid on, it is considered polite to let the musicians and MC go first. Not only have they been working hard all night, possibly after a long drive to reach the venue, they also don't have much time to get ready for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half – and need all the time they can get.
- Keep an eye on the clock so you don't end up rushing to the loo just as the first dance of the second half is announced, which results in delays in making up sets

### **At the End of the Night**

- Join in the applause to show your appreciation for the musician and MC.
- If you have to leave before the last dance, do so quietly without disturbing other dancers – particularly if they are trying to listen to a recap at the time. Consider taking your belongings outside into the hallway and changing your shoes there.
- After the last dance (and polka, and old lang syne, if applicable), leave promptly as venues often only have 10 or 15 minutes to clear up and lock up. You can chat in the car park.