

## **What Is An Advanced Dancer?**

**By Terry Jones**

What is an advanced dancer? How do I recognize one? How do I know when I am one? Of all the concepts I try to explain this is by far the easiest. "An advanced dancer is one who does basic patterns with advanced technique and advanced patterns with basic technique."

So often dancers seem to equate advanced steps with advanced dancing, they think that because they can "get through" or "pull off" an advanced pattern that they must be advanced. What they usually don't see is they have lost basic elements of the dance such as timing, rhythm, characteristic movement, leading/following or the general flavor of the dance. What then remains is simply a demonstration of body placements, which if watched like a silent movie, would be unrecognizable as to what dance is being done. I have been an athlete my whole life and have been teaching dance for 20 years. In that time I have studied lots of body movement. For example: there are "salsa" moves that have not only been in couple dances that go as far back as the minuet, but also in ballet, jazz, tap, gymnastics, martial arts and yoga. An advanced dancer never loses sight of the basics that make up the dance he/she is executing, unfortunately an intermediate dancer never loses sight of the step they are trying to do.

We've all seen a great athlete in action, when they do the truly awesome things we ooh and aah, but they are also admired for executing basic skills with incredible grace. The fact that they make it look so incredibly simple causes us to sometimes lose perspective until we see a less skilled person perform the same move. That less skilled person may be very good but compared to the more advanced athlete they look somewhat awkward or stiff. When discussing athletes such as Michael Jordan or Walter Peyton, one has to use the word "grace". Many athletes can "do" what these men have done, very few are described as graceful. A fitting story: At a major international dance contest, a world class dancer had recently paired up with a girl who was not yet recognized for her greatness. This couple were not being taken very serious as contenders. They had been doing their routines through all the rounds until it was getting near the end. In the rumba, all the competitors started doing their rumba routines except this couple. They started on one end of the ballroom floor, with him backing up, they started doing rumba walks across the floor. No tricks, no turns, not even basic patterns-just had her doing forward walks across the floor. These weren't just any walks, they were perfect. By the time they were halfway across the floor the room was exploding from excitement. During that song, that girl proved beyond anyones wildest dreams she was the best in the world. She could do her routines as well as anyone else there, but when it came to advanced techniques in a basic ( and you can't get any more basic than walks) no one could touch her.

So how do you apply this to yourself? Always remember that even when you can "do" a more advanced pattern that you should go back and see if the quality of movement changes when you move from basics to advanced and back. If the basic has a different "feel" than the advanced pattern analyze why. Did you learn a new skill in the advanced pattern that will improve your basic? Then apply it. Have you forgotten ( or not yet been able ) to apply basic techniques to advanced patterns? Then you're still missing pieces. Keep working at it. You can begin to claim to know a pattern when: 1) you know the pattern, 2) you can lead/follow it 3) you have smooth appearance, you have good style and the movements are representative of the dance you are doing and 4) you can do #1,#2 and #3 without thinking. You want to insert elements of yourself into it, you want to be able to relax and just dance. Never forget that dancing is supposed to be fun.