

“Oh, I’m not good enough to dance with you!”

By Tessa Cunningham

Has this thought ever entered your mind? Banish it immediately!

Imagine this scenario: You are in a bar, having a drink, trying to get the guts up to approach that very attractive person you’ve had your eye on all night. Finally you seize an opportunity and approach them, and as they see you walking in their direction, their face contorts into a mix of fear, disgust, and horror and they avert your gaze as though you were Medusa. They practically scream in protest with every step you take towards them. Got the image? Good. Pretty mortifying, eh? This is what frequently happens to us when we ask beginners to dance. Their intimidation is so debilitating that they forget that we are human beings with feelings.

Beginners can worry that they are ‘bothering’ the better dancers by asking them to dance or to help them with something. They can also feel they don’t want to embarrass themselves or feel like they are being “tested”. Advanced dancers do enjoy dancing with other advanced dancers and unfortunately you also get the occasional dance snob. This can mean that you get divided groups or a circumstance where the beginners don’t feel comfortable. So how do we avoid this? In general, the goal of all this is fun. Fun is not proportional to expertise. It ain’t what you’ve got it’s what you do with it. So relax and enjoy yourself.

Most advanced dancers like to help out and usually feel flattered when people ask for advice or to show them a move. The best dancers are ones who can lead or follow ANYONE and realize that they can learn from everyone. They are also aware that as good as they may be in their local scene there are always hundreds of people elsewhere who are WAY better than they are. So they are rarely snobbish. Finally, they want a place to dance, and people to dance with. If they act like jerks when people are beginners, what happens when those beginners get really good and they do want to dance with them? They also know that if you don’t help create those new advanced dancers (by being friendly and dancing with them when they are beginners) you run the risk of not having a dance scene at all. For an advanced dancer that is a fate worse than death.

So, all you beginning dancers, it’s not a one way thing at all. Remember that you are actually doing the advanced dancers a FAVOUR by showing up dancing with them. We LOVE dancing with beginners – their pure, raw basics are refreshing and exciting like a new apartment waiting to be decorated. At the same time, advanced dancers also need time to dance with people at their own level so make sure they get their time to do that too. Beginners should dance with lots of other beginners. You will teach each other, discover things you are doing wrong, or just commit what you’ve learned to physical memory by repetition.

So, the next time you are approached by an advanced dancer, let your face express excitement and honour even if you are feeling sick to your stomach from nerves. If you’ve got a heartbeat and there’s music playing, we want to dance with you.