

SECTION VII

THE ART OF LEADING

LEADING is the art of directing a partner thru a dance and it is solely the responsibility of the *man*. The ladies are properly critical of the faulty leading of their various partners. Their criticism of poor leadership falls under three types; too indecisive or "limp," too late, and the third complaint—too rough. The first two complaints are most frequent and probably stem from the same cause. While some ineffective or weak leading may be due purely to personality, it is more probable that in most cases it is due to uncertainty with regard to the actual routine. Unwilling to embarrass himself by showing his ignorance, the M avoids leading and waits; hoping that either the instructor will supply the next cue, that a nearby couple will proceed with the routine in time to help, or that his own partner will "take over" and indicate the step that should be carried out next. A man can hardly *lead* unless he himself knows what to do, so his first consideration is to *know the dance*. Each must learn the steps, but, while the W usually learns more quickly, she must not usurp the lead. She may assist by being very sure of her own part and by being alert and ready to perform it. She must also maintain light but definite contact as explained in the next paragraph, since no man can dance well with a "jelly fish." There are a few instances where the W can actively help a less experienced partner by *forcing* or *fudging* a shade before the counts in the *STEP BETWEEN* of the turning waltz. If the W pivots quickly and cleanly on the waltz turn it will help the man tremendously. Most men resent actual *physical* leading as much as it displeases them to have a partner continually telling them what to do. Again, with some exceptions, discussion of dance steps during a dance is likely to result in more confusion than help.

Since the actual *position* assumed is of prime importance in effective leading, it may be well to review some of the points brought out in Section IV. Bear in mind that a close ballroom embrace restricts the free movement and balance necessary for R/D. However, there must always be a definite contact between the M R and the W L hand and arm since most of the leading is done there. The M R hand is placed on or just below the W left shoulder blade, and there should be a slight but definite pressure between this hand and the W back. Some W have a tendency to pull away too strongly, while others give in to that pressure, lean toward the M and lose contact; *either* situation will prevent an effective and comfortable lead. While some R/D instructors feel that most of the actual leading is done by M R hand at this point of contact, it is probable that the rest of the contact with that arm is of equal importance. The M should keep his R elbow high (but without hunching the shoulder) and pointed away from the body. The W L hand should rest on his upper arm or lower shoulder, and her arm should rest upon his arm—particularly near the elbow. The joined hand clasp, M L and W R, is mainly for appearance and balancing purposes, although it has also a definite function for *signals* and as an adjunct in leading—it gives you two "reins" for steering. Properly maintained, this position allows almost any lead movement on the part of the M to communicate itself to his partner. To prove this point, stand and move for several steps in this position. Then, have the M drop his R elbow down to lose contact with the W L arm and loosen his R hand contact, dropping it to the W waist. Try the same steps and turns and you feel the difference. Incidentally, it is very important that unless otherwise directed, the M keep his partner in *front* of him when in closed position. Shifting unnecessarily into banjo pos or allowing the body to twist away from parallel with one's partner will spoil the appearance and execution of many figures.

Leading *signals* are an individual matter but all good dancers have some method of warning their partners of a desired movement and direction just before the change is started. In closed pos, a very light push, or lift, or straightening of the M left elbow will indicate a CW turn. Similarly, a trace of a pull, a slight lowering of the hand or a bending of the elbow will make it clear that a CCW turn will follow. A twirl under a hand and arm may be indicated by a shifting of the clasp and a slight tightening of the hold with that hand—at the same time easing slightly the hold with the other hand and arm. In either the facing position or the Varsouvianna, hand signals indicate clearly the type and direction of the next move. For example, in "Waltz of the Bells," where the twirl follows the swd sliding steps, some dancers twirl with the lead hand and others with the rear hand. A slackening of clasp with one hand and a shifting and tightening