Back to the Basics-SEEING April 2019, Outside Change

**Watch the Mirrors!**

It helps to be honest with yourself. From the last event you attended, magazine you looked at, internet videos you pulled up, or maybe your weekly/daily visit to the studio, what image(s) pop into your mind? Is it the handsome lead or his beautiful partner? Could it be the alluring dancewear? Any chance you were impressed with the sharp foot/hip movement, swaying and extended strides, or the harmony in the partnership?

Let’s deal with the reality of our dancing scenario. Our instructors are most often very pleasant to look at, and their movements on the dance floor tend to draw our attention during a competition or in the studio. But what am I looking at; where is my focus? Am I observing the complexity of a dance pattern demonstrated out, and do I understand it? In this article I’ll briefly address seeing the dance patterns, the body/foot movement, and the partnership. These points are offered as guidelines to develop a personal sense of “sight” to help your dancing develop and mature.

Our instructors tell us not to look at our feet when we dance. This is probably the first, most frequent and most important suggestion for a beginning dancer to keep our head and frame up and correctly aligned. At the same time we do need to watch others, more preferably our instructors, when they demonstrate a step pattern for us. I have found three points of interest when I watch dance in action, 1) feet to the floor, 2) foot alignment to body movement, and 3) the foot interaction between partners. Remember my notes come to you as an amateur. I have had 20+ years of dance experience, but I am not a certified instructor. Please take my comments as suggestions. Here we go . . .

1. Keeping my feet in touch with the floor is something I personally need to backtrack on. If you are not maintaining contact with the floor your balance suffers and so does your partner.
2. Knowing and understanding the direction your feet are supposed to go I consider to be primary to ballroom dancing. You may notice sometimes your feet go one way and your body or your head go another. As you watch a couple perform, watch long enough that you see their differing foot/body movements (including arms and head styling) through various patterns.
3. Then comes the all-important element of coordinating with your partner. What you see as a complete picture is hopefully a couple dancing in unison. If you watch closely, you will notice their movement or their feet are sometimes parallel or matching but more often they are blended, not exactly the same but complimenting one another.

To an instructor, when was the last time you paused in the lesson to ask your student what they see as you demonstrate a new step or pattern or as they watch another couple practicing in the studio? If you know what their perception is, it might sharpen your teaching method with them as an individual. People have different ways of processing what they visually intake.

To a student I encourage you to share with your instructor or ask questions relative to what you are seeing. If I really like what I see, or don’t understand what I am looking at, I will stop my instructor to ask for further explanation or demonstration.

Remember, those mirrors in the studio are to promote our visual learning! The instructors use them; students would likewise benefit.