

THE PRINCIPLES OF STANDARD DANCING

English version

Oliver Rehder

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I find „The Principles of Standard Dancing“ very, very interesting and useful. It delves into many topics, and the explanations are very clear. Good job!!!

Alessia Betti

To be different gives a great chance to create something special that will surely be interesting and noticed worldwide. When it combines with a genius approach filling up an existing gap, it surely cuts the edge.

Oliver Rehder, with his book "The Principles of Standard Dancing", combines all these characteristics in clear descriptions of biomechanical explanations of movement sequences independent of any style of dance, and, what is even more important, basic principles have largely been preserved.

You'll not only enjoy reading and studying the book, you need it!!!

Luigi Bodini

Oliver Rehder's "The Principles of Standard Dancing" is a remarkable contribution to the world of dance education from his standpoint as a dancer, educator, researcher, and author. This book serves as an inspiring guide, pushing dancers of all levels to delve deeper into the intricacies of Ballroom dancing. From beginners seeking foundational knowledge to experienced dancers aiming to deepen their understanding, Oliver Rehder's insights offer clarity and connection to the fundamental principles of Ballroom dancing. Following up, I found it intriguing to explore related videos online, and you can even delve into some insightful podcasts where Oliver is invited to discuss his book, providing remarkable clarity on the details. For myself and my students, it is not just a book; it's a catalyst for evolution in both technique and understanding within the dance community. Whether you're a dancer, educator, or enthusiast, "The Principles of Standard Dancing" is an invaluable resource and reference point that will undoubtedly elevate your understanding and appreciation of this beautiful art form.

Warren Boyce

Dear Oliver,

After reviewing your new book on the principles of standard dances, I want to express my heartfelt thanks. It is a unique analysis that did not exist in the world of standard dancing before. I am not aware of any comparable work.

For everyone seeking a deep understanding of standard dancing, the book is an absolute expansion of knowledge that I have been waiting for a long time.

I wish you and your book all the best for the future.

Karl Breuer

Really a great book!!! I suggest to all dancers to have it! Well done, Oliver, you did a fantastic job.

Valerio Colantoni

Recommended to all dancers!!! Bravo.

Andrea and Sara Ghigiarelli

Dear Oliver,

You have clearly put a lot of work and effort into compiling this book and it is comprehensive and informative.

We send you our sincere congratulations.

Richard Gleave CBE and Anne Gleave

This very special book – now released in English language – is so special that I would like to recommend it to all dancers who want – instead of new steps – learn more about the principles and body mechanics in our

five Standard dances.

Oliver was a highly trained competitor and is now a successful coach who is sharing his knowledge with us and the next generation.

I wish "The Principles of Standard Dancing" all the success it deserves.

Evelyn Hädrich-Hörmann

Competitors and coaches should study this interesting and informative book.

Anthony Hurley

This book did not surprise me, as I have known Oliver since his youth and am aware of how analytically and seriously he approaches this sport, even as my long-time student. The information contained within is not only extremely helpful for dancers and coaches but also provides the opportunity to gain new perspectives and engage in self-reflection. Excellent work, Oliver, and I wish you great success with this book.

Asis Khadjeh-Nouri

Dear Oliver,

big congratulations for your new book!

You did an incredible work and it's definitely one of the most structured and informative books about ballroom dancing ever made. I recommend it for every dancer.

Domen Krapez

In the modern era of DanceSport, "The Principles of Standard Dancing" represents the perfect bridge between the traditional principles of ballroom dancing and the contemporary approach to the discipline. Oliver has done an outstanding job, both in the original edition and in its subsequent revisions, preserving the essence of the art while making it highly relevant for modern dancers.

The book is exceptionally well structured, providing clear guidance and valuable direction for today's DanceSport athletes and teachers. Personally, I consider this work a true source of inspiration for the entire DanceSport community – a reference capable of supporting and shaping the evolution of our discipline in the years to come.

Pino Magnelli and Francesca Pietramale

Well done! Recommend this to all teachers and dancers! Very informative!

Aleksander Makarov

Dear Oliver, congratulations on your book! You've managed to thoroughly and logically summarize the principles of standard dancing! Amazing work!

Petra Matschullat

"The Principles of Standard Dancing" is a very systematic approach to analyze and describe the complexity of movements in Ballroom Dancing. Therefore, the detailed explanations reach beyond the limits of most of our existing technique books, that prioritize the tabular style of describing the results of actions, rather than the actions themselves.

Throughout the whole book, the written explanations are accompanied by clearly understandable graphic illustrations. I see a special value in some of them, since they provide a helpful and simplified visualization of the usage of different body parts.

Well-founded knowledge, skills and a great amount of dedication are needed to create such a clear structured presentation. I appreciate the tremendous work that has been done by Oliver Rehder, it surely contributes to

the development of a written heritage of our art. I am looking forward to the future development of information based on this first book.

Lasse Ødegaard

The best book to keep you on a right dancing track!

Raimonds Pisevs

Simply very well and easy explanation! Love this book! Well done, Oliver.

Fabio Selmi

"The Principles of Standard Dancing" by Oliver Rehder is a very comprehensive and well researched written book.

I recommend this for everybody with an interest in Ballroom dancing, it has so much worthwhile information.

Greg Smith

A very informative and well-structured book, with very clear explanations and graphic illustrations, covering all aspects and fundamental principles of ballroom standard dances. Strongly suggested to all dancers and teachers. Well done, Oliver.

Domenico Soale and Gioia Cerasoli

Really interesting book!

Evaldas Sodeika and Ieva Sodeikiene

It's really impressive the dedication of each detail. I am sure that it took a lot of work to express all this information in writing and on top of this also with precise drawings included all the ingredients that are needed to increase the knowledge base in Ballroom Dancing.

My sincere compliments to you dear Oliver to share such important details that every ballroom dancer should know.

Roberto Villa

Oliver Rehder, what a fantastic job you did with your book, „The Principles of Standard Dancing"! I truly appreciate your modern perspective on all aspects of ballroom dancing. It's incredibly clear and useful for teaching, understanding, and studying the intricate details of our beautiful passion.

This book is a must-have for anyone who genuinely loves the dance sport. One more heartfelt thank you, Oliver!

Robert Wota

We would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to the author, our longtime friend and former companion, Dr. Oliver Rehder, on his book "The Principles of Standard Dancing."

This book, with its clear structure, numerous images, and detailed explanations, demonstrates how the bridge between existing technical literature and modern dancing can be built.

It is therefore a valuable resource for every dance sport coach and all dance enthusiasts, and it should become essential reading, as it clearly illustrates how we understand today's style of dancing. At the same time, it can help to methodically learn and reinforce these principles.

Steffen and Sandra Zoglauer

Introduction

During my dancing career, I have always wished for a book with a systematic presentation and explanation of the principles of standard dancing. The existing technique books were largely concerned (or even still are) with the specific technique of individual figures, tabulating foot positions, footwork, alignments, sways, etc. Basic biomechanical explanations of the movement sequences in the sense of an elementary theory of movement are given rather briefly, or not at all.

The aim of this book is therefore to fill the existing gap. It is not intended to replace current technique books, but to explore standard dancing from a different angle. Here, the principles of standard dancing are analysed and described in detail in order to illustrate and clarify how the steps depicted in the classical technique books can be danced in an anatomically correct way. The emphasis is placed on the elements consistently found in all dances as well as on the differences between the dances. The principles mentioned in the following chapters can then be applied to a wide range of figures.

The principles presented are independent of any specific style danced and the current fashions. The extent of the various movements has changed over time as dancing has evolved, while the basic principles behind them have remained in general.

Of course, there have also been elementary changes in some principles that have led to somewhat of a paradigm shift compared to the standard dancing of earlier decades. The subsequent chapters will further elaborate on these developments in detail.

Standard dancing is a sport that encompasses an artistic element. Whether something is deemed as "aesthetic" is not determined by an independently verifiable law of nature, but by joint consensus in the world of dance sport. This book attempts to present the current consensus, based on the fundamental principles that have been in place for decades and have been modified in some areas. There will be further changes in the future because dance sport is evolving, just like other sports, technologies, sciences, etc. However, anatomical structures and biomechanical laws should be respected in order not to endanger the dancers' health.

This book addresses all dancers who want to develop a systematic understanding of the movement principles for their dancing. During dance training, statements by trainers may occasionally appear contradictory, even though they often share the same underlying concept. The subsequent chapters aim to help categorize different explanations with the objective of achieving faster improvement of one's technical skills.

Furthermore, dance sport trainers who are looking for a more in-depth study of the basic movement theory of standard dancing, in addition to the already existing technique books, may benefit from the content of the book.

For adjudicators, knowledge of the biomechanical processes in standard dancing is also advantageous, as movement sequences can then be judged better and faster.

To support the text-based explanations, drawings have been added that illustrate the respective principles. Couples of the current world elite served as models. Moreover, schematic representations are employed to simplify complex issues. The most important keywords in the text are highlighted for better clarity. Furthermore, each chapter concludes with a summary to recap and emphasize the most important points.

For further visualization, a YouTube channel bearing the same title as the book can be found via the QR code shown on the right. A growing number of videos is intended to further illustrate the content of the book. By subscribing to the channel, you will be notified directly whenever new videos are uploaded.



When referring to "Man" and "Lady", this should be understood as "Leader" and "Follower" in the case of same-sex dance couples.

Just as ballroom dancing is not static and continues to evolve, this book will also consider innovations in dancing in future editions and be open to further developments. If, as a reader, you have the impression that certain facets of the principles of standard dancing have not yet been fully addressed, or if you identify any errors in the book, I would be delighted to hear from you - just as I am about positive feedback - via email at oliver.rehder@gmx.de or through my social media accounts.

I hope you enjoy reading and studying the book.



Dr Oliver Rehder

Chapter Overview

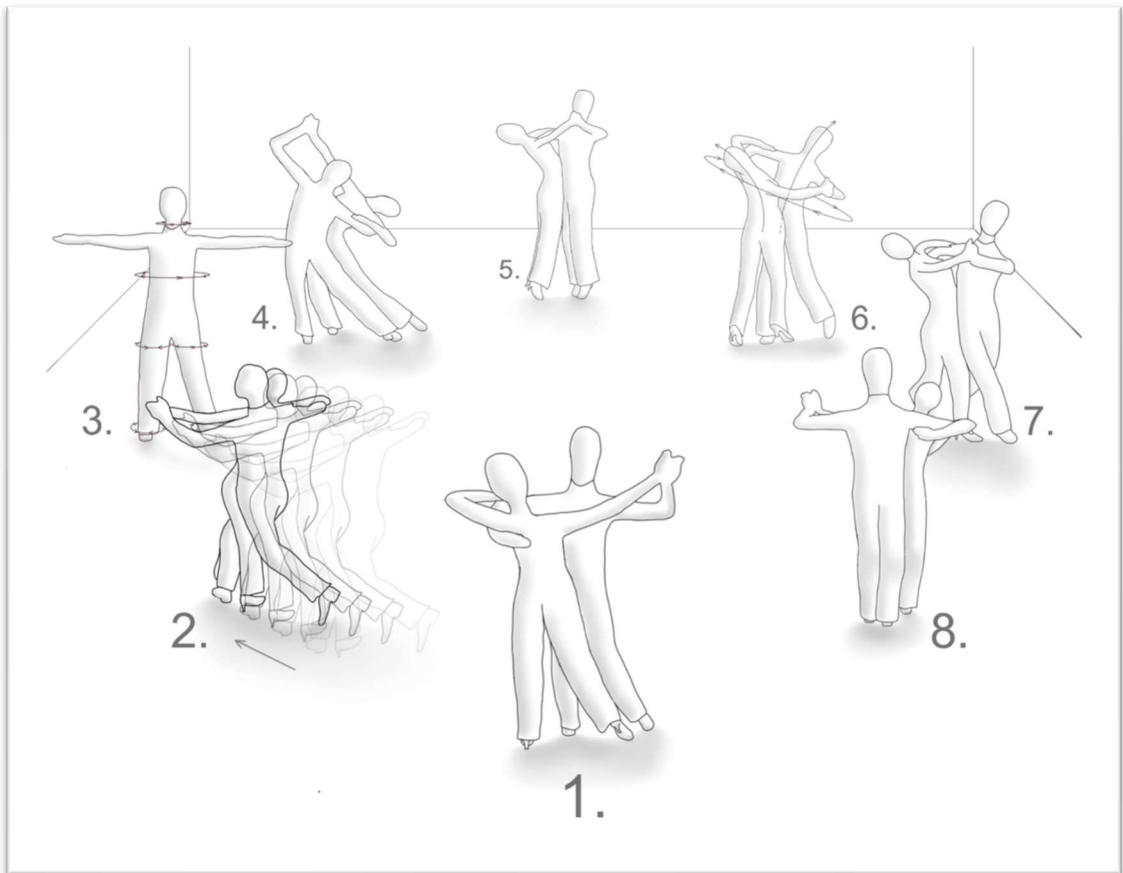


Figure 1: Graphical overview of the eight chapters of the book depicted below, with each chapter visualized by an illustrative image

In **Chapter 1**, the **basic position of the individual dancer** and the **posture/hold of the couple** in the swing dances are explained in detail (see Figure 1). The correct basic position and posture/hold are the foundation for all movements, which is why this chapter precedes the others.

To comprehend the different movements, it is essential that all planes of movement can be distinguished from each other to connect them to the desired degree. Therefore, they are analysed separately **in the following chapters**. They are divided into **spatial and stationary movements**, which are then in turn further subdivided. Ultimately, however, all planes of movement should be harmoniously linked to create a coherent sequence of

movements and to demonstrate musicality.

Chapter 2 (see Figure 1) deals with the **spatial movement**, especially the foot and leg work, which creates the typical character of the swing dances.

The vertical movement, including rising and lowering (y-axis), can be differentiated from the horizontal movement forward and backward (z-axis), as well as sideways (x-axis) (see Figure 2). The vertical and horizontal movements usually overlap or merge.

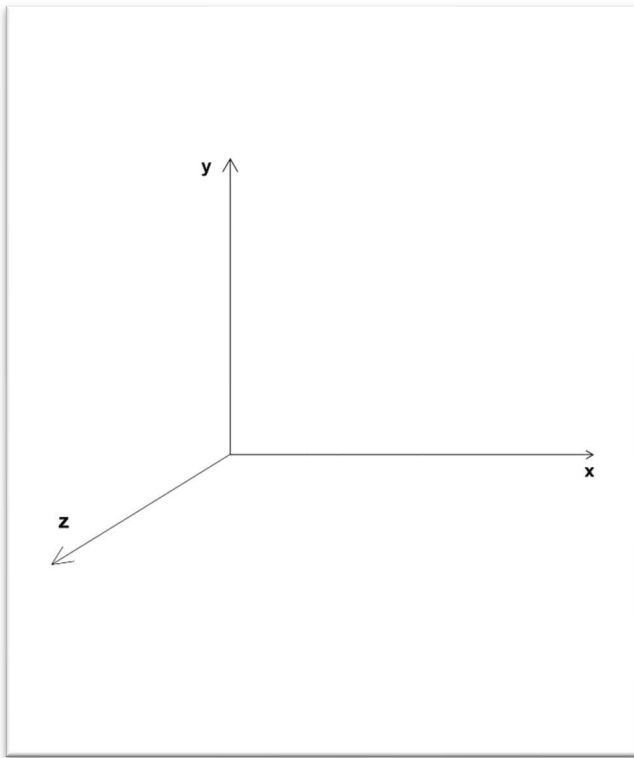


Figure 2: Illustration of the three dimensions of spatial movement

After discussing the similarities between the swing dances, the differences between them are presented. This is followed by an explanation of non-swinging movements in the swing dances, such as jumping elements in Quickstep, line figures, and other movements. **Chapters 3, 4, and 5** focus on **stationary movements** such as rotation, sway, etc., that can take place without spatial movement. However, spatial and stationary movements typically overlap. As a rule, there is no spatial movement that does not involve rotation, sway, etc. in some form.

Furthermore, there is usually overlap within the stationary movements. For example, sway is often accompanied by extension, and a sideways shift of the upper body regularly occurs in conjunction with rotation.

In order to codify the stationary movements, they are divided into three body planes: the transversal, frontal, and sagittal plane (see Figure 3).

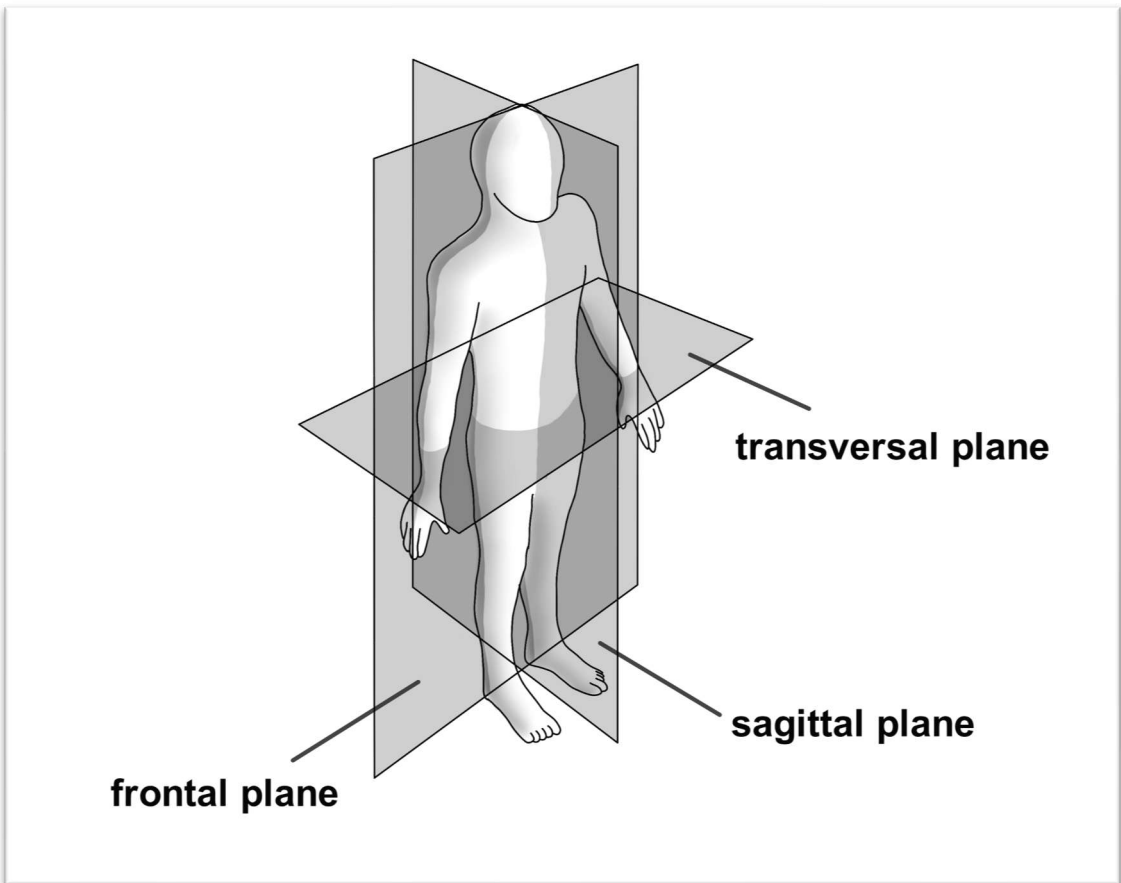


Figure 3: The three planes of the body

Chapter 3 (see Figure 1) deals with the transversal plane (see Figure 3). This can be imagined as a cake stand (see Figure 4). In this plane, **rotational movements** take place on different levels around a vertical axis.

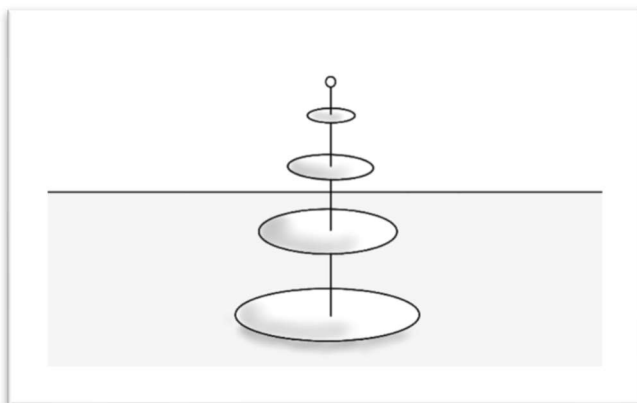


Figure 4: Drawing of a cake stand to illustrate the principle of different levels of rotation in the transversal plane

In this chapter, all rotations that take place in the different joints of the body are described:

- foot and leg rotation
- hip rotation
- upper body rotation
- neck/head rotation

Through the different types of rotation, the couple can, for example,

- rotate around each other in a stationary or spatially moving manner,
- show more flexibility in dancing by rotating the neck/head area and using the head weight to initiate movements,
- turn around each other on the outside or inside circle, and
- change the couple position.

Chapter 4 (see Figure 1) deals with movements in the frontal plane (see Figure 3 and Figure 5). These can be visualised as actions performed parallel to a wall.

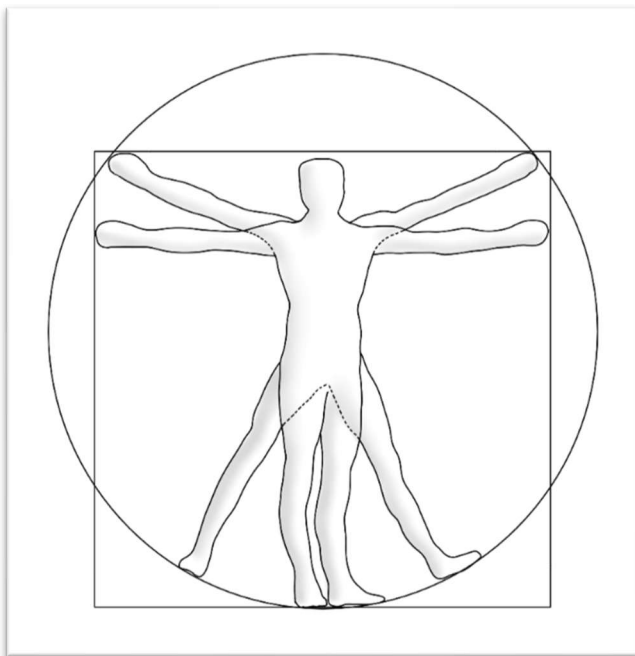


Figure 5: "The Vitruvian Man" by Leonardo da Vinci as an illustration of the frontal plane

In the frontal plane, the following types of movement take place:

- **Lateral shift of the body blocks** in relation to each other, especially the upper body in relation to the hips ("lateral upper body shift").
- **Sway** of the body and the head: sway is an inclination of the shoulder and arm line, as well as of the head, resulting from the various movements in the ankles, hip joints, and spine.

Chapter 5 (see Figure 1) deals with the sagittal plane (see Figure 3). The name is derived from the Latin word "sagitta", which means "arrow". The plane extends into the third dimension, i.e. into the spatial depths. The following movements take place in this plane:

- **Extension:** A curve of the head and torso backward (see Figure 6). This may be danced to different degrees and should be balanced by a countermovement forward in the underlying body areas. The chapter explains how the extension is modified in the different couple positions and what the differences are within a figure, as well as between different types of figures.
- **Sagittal inclination:** the couple tilts forward or backward.



Figure 6: Illustration of an extension backward in ballet as an example of a movement in the sagittal plane

Chapter 6 (see Figure 1) is about the combination of the different movements explained in detail in the previous chapters, i.e. rotation, sway, lateral upper body shift, extension, and sagittal inclination. This combination is referred to as "**shape**", i.e. the shape of the body in all three dimensions.

The topic is subdivided into the similarities and differences between the shapes of Man and Lady, the different couple positions, and whether the shape serves to maintain balance or to deliberately lose it for a brief moment. The typical shape sequence within a swing figure is explained, as well as the changes in the hold that facilitate the creation

of shape.

Chapter 7 (see Figure 1) focuses on the topic of **leading and following**. It discusses how the Man leads the Lady in Closed Position and outlines the tasks of the Lady. This is followed by an explanation of how to lead the various couple positions, certain turning elements, and the extension of the Lady. Subsequently, establishing and maintaining **body contact** is elaborated on.

In **Chapter 8** (see Figure 1), the **Tango** is explained, and the differences to the swing dances are shown regarding the posture and the mentioned planes of movement.

At the end of the book, there is a **glossary** where terms can be looked up. Technical terms are also explained when they appear in the text for the first time. This is followed by the **acknowledgements** to the people without whom this book would not have been possible and finally the **index** and **bibliography**.

1. Individual Basic Position and the Couple's Posture and Hold

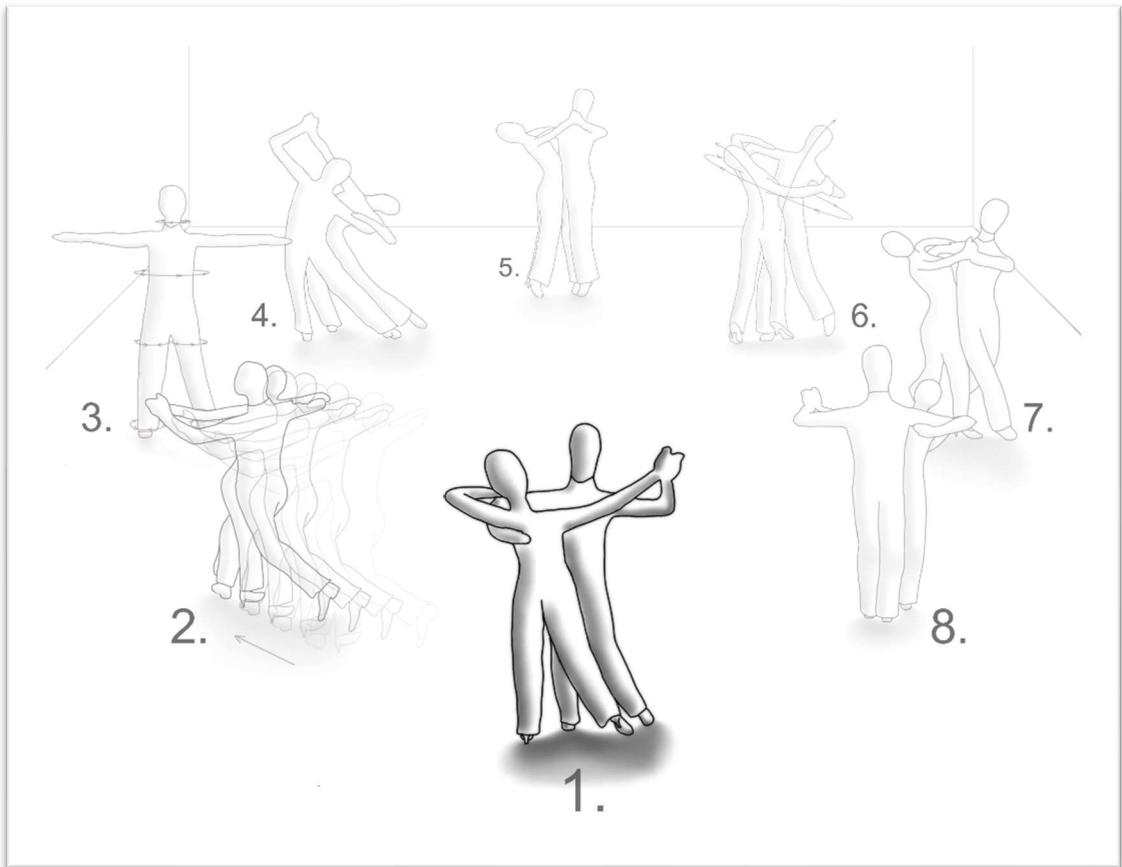


Figure 7: Chapter 1: Individual basic position and the couple's posture and hold

1.1 Individual Basic Position

In the following section, the individual basic position of both partners is discussed (see Figure 8). A proper individual position ensures that both dancers are adequately prepared to take their common hold.

The following points are crucial:

- The head, shoulders, pelvis, and feet are **vertically** aligned in both the frontal and lateral view.

- The feet are closed, and the weight is in the middle of the foot (as seen from the side in the sagittal plane) and between the feet (as seen from the front in the frontal plane).
- The **spine** is **straightened** using antigravity muscle groups. As a result, the natural double-S shape of the spine is somewhat straightened.
- The abdominal area gains a slight tone during the straightening of the spine.
- The shoulder blades are slightly pulled downwards ("depression"), thus achieving control of the position of the shoulder blades in relation to the torso. It is vital to maintain the shoulder position, avoiding a "hollow back" or "round back".

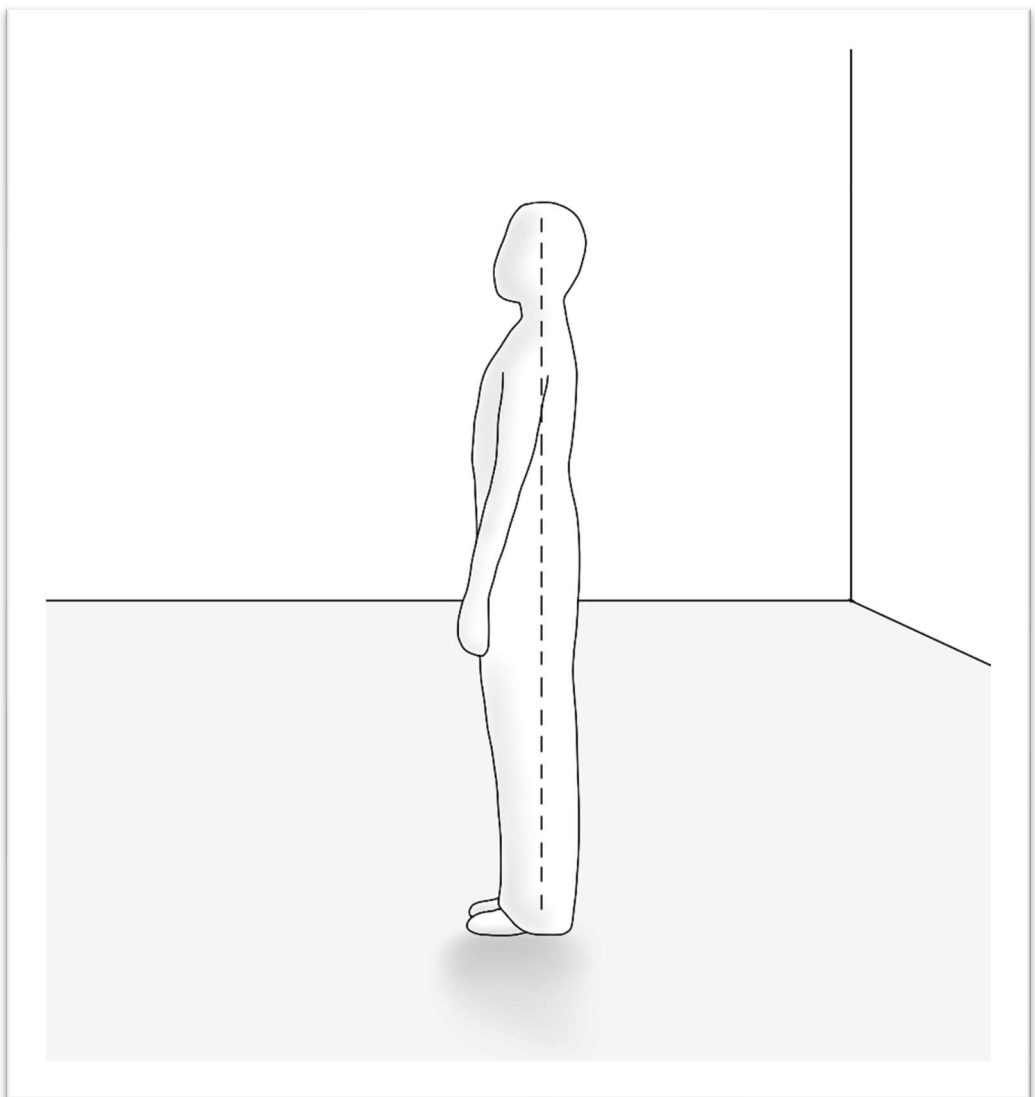


Figure 8: Individual basic position before taking the hold

1.2 Posture and Hold of the Couple

The most important principle regarding the posture and hold of the couple is to **start from the bottom and move up**. For example, if foot positions are incorrect, creating a wide head distance is not possible or only possible with impaired balance and additional physical effort.

Another fundamental principle is that no body part affecting the centre of gravity should be moved without a **compensatory movement** of other body parts in the opposite direction (see Figure 9 and Laban's writings about "kinesphere"). Failure to do so would negatively impact the individual balance or couple's balance.

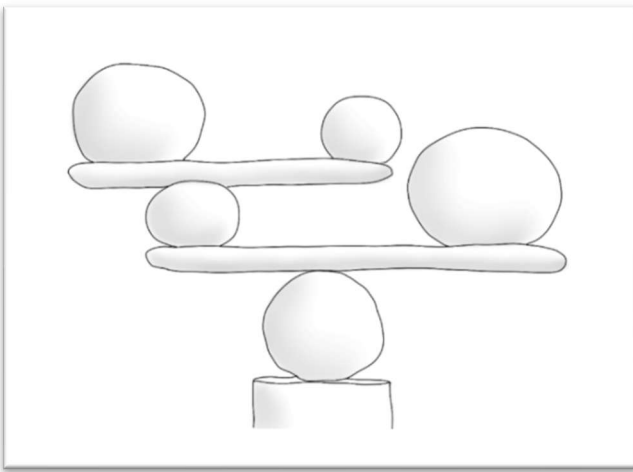


Figure 9: Example of balance where different elements balance each other out

1.2.1 Feet

For the feet in the basic position of the couple, the following principles apply (see Figure 10):

- The **Man** stands on the **right foot** and the **Lady** on the **left foot**.
- The foot of the **moving leg** (free leg) touches the floor with the inside edge of the toe and bears a minimum partial weight.
- Both feet are **parallel** to each other and to the partner's feet.
- The distance between both feet and legs must allow the right thigh of each partner to fit easily between the legs of the other.
- The Man's left foot is positioned laterally (in the frontal plane) and slightly behind the right foot (in the sagittal plane).
- The Lady's right foot is positioned laterally (in the frontal plane) and slightly in front of the left foot (in the sagittal plane), which provides a counterbalance to the Lady's backward and leftward poise.

- The Lady's left foot is placed approximately **10–15 cm** from the Man's right foot, both to the left (from the Lady's point of view) and backward.
- As a result, the centres of both partners are also slightly offset to the right of each other (see Chapter 1.2.3).

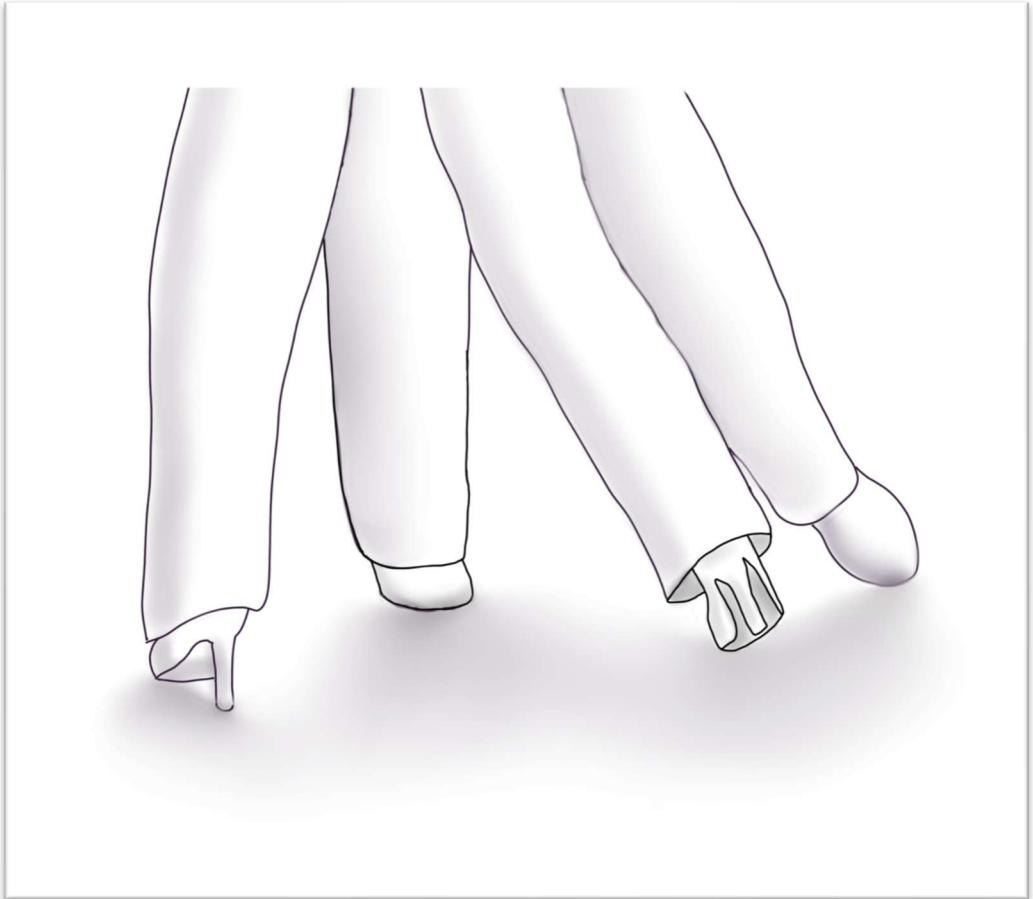


Figure 10: Foot position when viewing the couple's legs and feet from the front

1.2.2 Legs

The following principles apply to the legs in the basic position (see Figure 11):

- The knees of the supporting legs (**supporting leg** refers to the leg on which the entire body weight, or most of it, rests) are slightly bent forward, creating contact between the partners in the centre of their body and a "couple balance". (Refer to Chapter 1.2.3 for more information on the "centre".) The total contact area extends from the touching inner and outer thighs to the centre.



Figure 11: Foot and leg position from the side view

- The Lady's centre (see Figure 12) is about a hand's width lower than that of the Man. If the height difference of the partners is so large that the aforementioned relation to each other is not automatically established, the taller partner must bend the knees more, but only to the extent that it does not restrict the spatial movement.
- The knee of the moving leg is also bent forward, and due to the position of the foot (inner edge of the toe), it is slightly further forward than the supporting leg's knee.
- In the basic position, the Man encloses the Lady's right thigh with the insides of his thighs.

1.2.3 Hip and Upper Body

The following principles apply to the hips and upper body:

- The **individual centre** is located in the abdominal area between the hip and the lowest rib (see Figure 12).

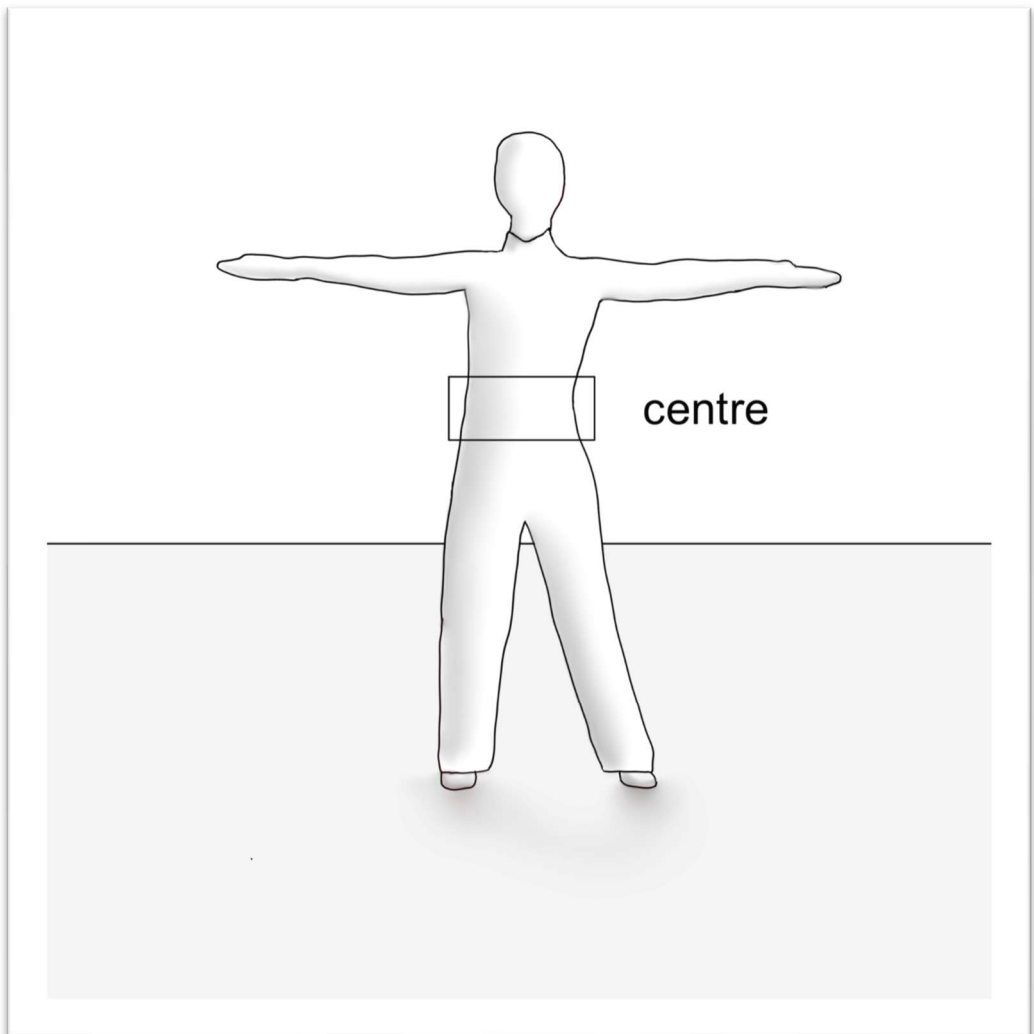


Figure 12: Individual centre

- As shown above, the contact between the partners is established through the aforementioned distance of the feet of the supporting legs, the bending of the knees, and the forward movement of the spine, creating a stable connection between the two centres and a **common couple centre**. This results in more harmonious movements, as it is no longer just two individuals positioned in front of each other, but rather two individuals connected as a couple. However, the pressure should only be so strong that both partners can independently straighten up into their individual balance. The change of contact during dancing is discussed in Chapter 7.5.

Couples at a lower level should approach this principle with caution, as establishing and maintaining a couple balance is coordinatively demanding. They can start with a smaller distance between their feet, which will result in a smaller extension, as the extension backward cannot be balanced by a forward countermovement due to the smaller distance between the two partners.

- Hips and shoulders are parallel to each other.
- The shoulder blades are slightly pulled downwards (as described for the individual basic position in Chapter 1.1) without affecting the position of the shoulders and elbows. This enables control of the position of the shoulder blades relative to the torso.
- In addition, **movements in three planes** are necessary:
 - **rotation** in the transversal plane
 - **lateral upper body shift** in the frontal plane
 - **extension** in the sagittal plane

These movements are presented separately in the following sections to break down each action and make it easier to understand. However, when taking hold, all actions should take place **together and be connected**, giving a natural overall impression.

It should also be emphasised that during the lateral upper body shift and extension, there is always a **countermovement** in the underlying area of the body to maintain balance and allow the movements to develop organically from the bottom up.

1. **Rotation in the basic position of the couple** (see Figure 13, Figure 14):

- The first **rotation** described here takes place **separately in the upper body**. In addition, both partners can rotate their bodies together around an imaginary centre. This is explained below. (For more information on rotation, see Chapter 3.1).

The left side rotates minimally forward and the right side minimally backward (see Figure 13). This occurs independently of the hips and elbows. The goal is to present the left side forward. In addition, the right side moves back a little in relation to the right elbow, creating more space between the shoulders of both partners, which the Lady can use for her extension (see also Figure 13).

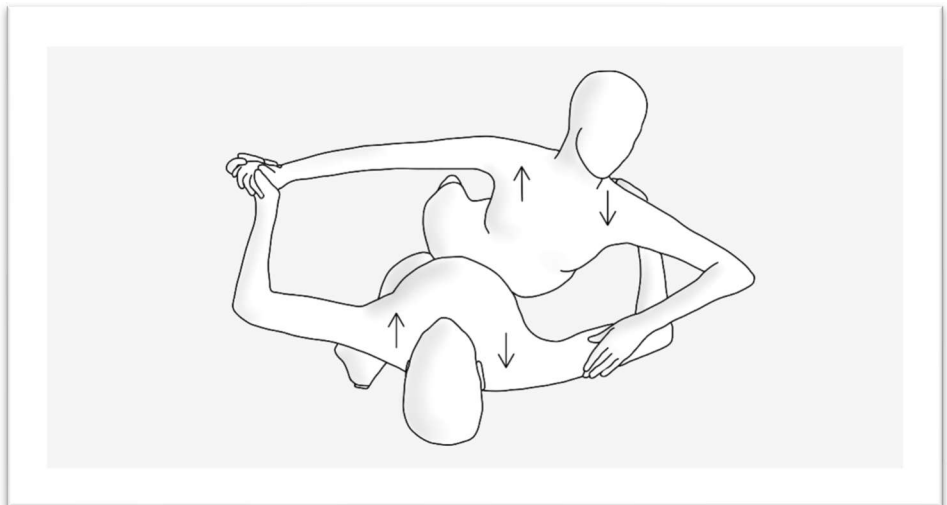


Figure 13: Separate rotation of the upper body to the right with a forward movement of the left side and a backward movement of the right side, as seen from above, around the imaginary axis of rotation of each spine. At the same time, the lateral shift of the upper body (see Figure 16) and the development of extension (see Figure 18) must take place.

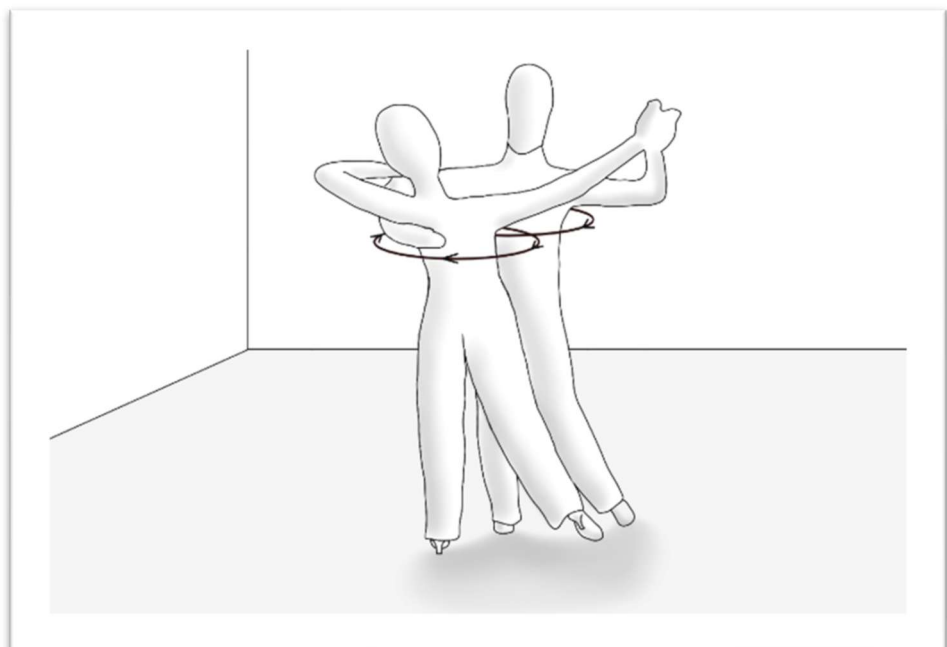


Figure 14: Separate rotation of the upper body to the right as seen from the front view