



SIMON'S **Swing Notes**

Welcome to Swing Notes where I will be musing about life in the swing world, commenting on what's going on and more often than not, the why & how you can get the most out of your dancing.

Diving into the annals of history & traditions that have been handed down to me, the aim is to be educational, thought-provoking & occasionally controversial, sharing my thoughts on the dance, music, history & today's swing dance scene.

Be warned - they will seriously improve your dancing!

Swing Notes Vol 326: What level are you?

By Simon Selmon

Are you a beginner, intermediate, or advanced dancer?

Perhaps you now mostly enjoy social dancing and only dip into special workshops occasionally. Or maybe you've reached a stage where you're happy just to dance without worrying about advancing further. Traditionally, January, with its New Year's resolutions, and September, the start of the academic year, are popular times for people to consider taking classes. This edition of Swing Notes is here to help you figure out where you stand in the world of Swing dance.

What Workshop Level Is Right for Me?

Here are some of my personal descriptions for Lindy Hop levels:

Beginner

No experience needed whatsoever! Bring those two left feet, and we'll get you sorted out. This is the perfect starting point for anyone new to Swing dancing.

Fast Beginners

No prior experience is necessary, but this class moves at a slightly faster pace than an absolute beginners' class. It's ideal if you've done a few classes before or have experience in other dance styles.

Improvers

This level suits those who are no longer absolute beginners but still find intermediate classes a bit overwhelming. It's designed to help you build confidence and prepare for the next step up.

Intermediate

At this stage, you know the basic rhythms, including 6- and 8-counts, and Charleston steps. You may not have perfected them yet, but you can confidently dance several Swing Outs and variations of Lindy Charleston. There's still plenty to learn, but you've built a solid foundation.

General Level Dance class with SwingdanceUK at the Royal Alber Hall, photo by Kayvan Michael Photography



Intermediate/Advanced

This level is for confident intermediate dancers. You're starting to create your own steps, understand frame and connection, and explore musicality. While the learning curve may feel slower (you've already covered a lot of ground), you're searching for those golden nuggets of knowledge to refine your dancing.

Advanced

You've been dancing for quite some time and now realise it's not just about learning new moves. You're revisiting the basics, focusing on the finer details you may have overlooked before. Your attention shifts to mastering technique, connection, and musicality.

Advanced+/Professional

This level is for those with a professional dance background who've studied Swing dance for at least a year or for seasoned Swing dancers with years of experience. Perhaps you're a teacher yourself. You're ready for fast-paced classes, working on fundamentals with a sharper eye, and tackling advanced concepts like flow, improvisation, and creativity.

Level Labels and Realities

At the end of the day, any level is relative to your peers in the class. Some teachers use a numbered system; others invent catchy names. Regardless of the label, a class is only as good as its students. As a teacher, I often work with the "70% rule," adjusting the content to the general level of most participants. This approach ensures the majority of the group benefits from the class.

You might feel advanced in one class and struggle in another labelled intermediate. This is especially true when comparing local dance schools to large international camps, or even between different teachers. What matters more than the label on the door is whether you've gained something from the class. If you leave with one, two, or three new moves or ideas, that's a win. On the other hand, if you're too bored or too confused to remember what you've learned, the class wasn't the right fit for you.

Sometimes, it's less about the learning and more about the people. Perhaps you're there to make friends, enjoy yourself, and connect with like-minded individuals. After a long day of mental work, maybe you want to relax and dance without too much thinking. There's no right or wrong - just what works for you at that moment.

A Tough Question for Yourself

Here's the tough pill to swallow: can you be honest with yourself about where you are in your dancing journey? Are you clear about what you want to achieve? In a world of instant gratification, it's tempting to rush ahead. But sometimes, taking it slower might help you grow faster in the long run. Reflect on whether your level is fair to your fellow students in the class. Are you in the right place to maximise your learning while contributing positively to the group?

I'm a fan of open classes where all levels mix, much like a social dance floor. But ultimately, the key is to experiment. Try different classes, find the teachers who resonate with you, and discover the atmosphere you love. Most importantly, enjoy yourself. Swing dancing is about learning, connecting, and, above all, having a great time.



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