



# SIMON'S Swing Notes

*Welcome to Swing Notes where I will be musing about life in the swing world, commentating 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!*

## **Simon's Swing Notes Vol 340: Those Five Top Tips for Becoming a Better Swing Dancer - That Everyone Needs To Work On! By Simon Selmon**

Every dancer, from a week-one newbie to a seasoned social veteran, shares the same quiet hope: *to become a better dancer*. The wiser amongst us know that it doesn't always have to be perfect. It doesn't have to be flashy. But like in the Japanese philosophy of 'Kaizen', they want just a small, even 1%, improvement each time they dance. **More connected. More musical. More you.**

So here are five timeless tips that, if taken to heart (and onto the social floor), will make a remarkable difference. They're simple, but not small - the kind of fundamentals that are at the very heart of this dance.

## **1) Pay Attention to Your Partner**

We all want memorable dances, but here's the secret:

**If your partner has a great dance, you usually do too.**

Students today often struggle with confidence, overthinking, or feeling “stuck in their head”. Attentiveness is the antidote.

When you genuinely see your partner, not with an intense stare but with easy awareness, you tune into their energy, their comfort, their smile. That's where great dancing starts, not in the fancy footwork.

### **Try this:**

Notice their posture, their breathing, the micro-expressions that tell you how they're feeling. Adjust gently. Support where needed. Respond where you can. Celebrate the moments when they light up and you will both feel inspired.

Make your partner feel special, and the dance becomes special.



## 2) Call & Response - The Heart of Swing

One pain point dancers mention again and again?

**“I’m doing moves, but I’m not *connecting*.”**

Jazz gives us the remedy: conversation.

Swing dancing was built on call-and-response - musicians riffing off each other, dancers responding to the band, partners responding to one another.

A dance where both people talk at once is chaos.

A dance where one person never listens is dull.

But a dance where two people truly listen and respond? Magic.

**Try this:**

**Leads:** offer an action, then notice your partner's reaction and build from it.

**Follows:** reply with nuances, not autopilot.

Both allow surprises. Some of my best dances began with intentions that evaporated the moment my partner added something unexpected and went off in a different direction.

Conversation creates connection, and connection creates unforgettable dances.

### **3) Less Is More (Basie Approved)**

In a world where dancers try to cram a hundred steps into a single phrase, here's your permission to do less! Simplicity can be just as stylish, if not more so, than a dancer trying to fit in every move they know into one song.

Count Basie made his name on the notes he *didn't* play. Great dancers do the same.

Six beautifully timed patterns will beat twenty chaotic ones any night of the week.

Today's dancers often feel overwhelmed "I need more moves... I'm running out of ideas..." You don't need more moves. You need more music in your movement.

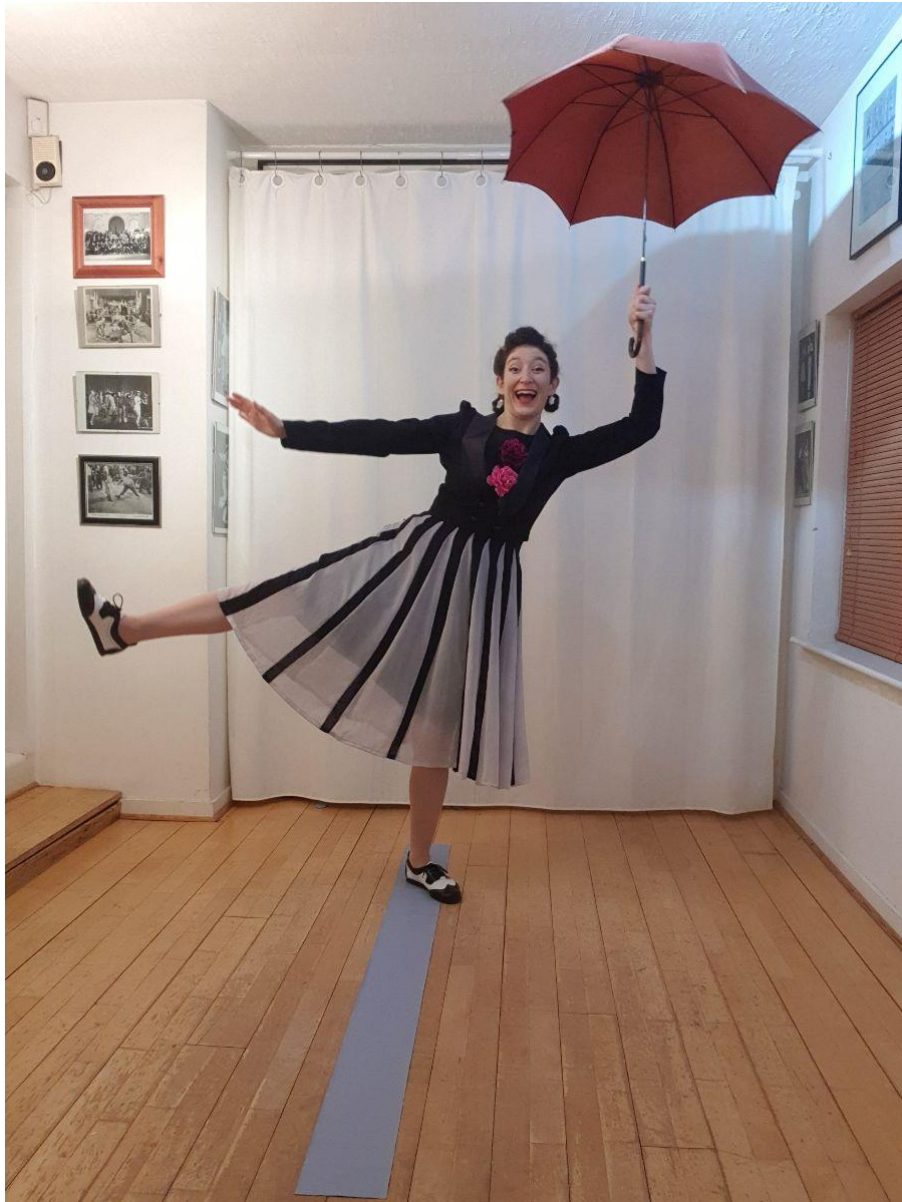
**Try this:**

**Leads:** master your basics so well that you can throw them away, and dance in that desired mindless / flow state. Improvise throughout a song just using your basics as a starting block.

**Follows:** get so quick at responding to your partner's lead that you start spotting those tasty little gaps within moves where you can add your own flavour/personality. That means sometimes taking out steps and replacing them with simple body movements, such as a hip roll, body isolation and pop or slowing down/speeding up a movement or effortlessly adding a clean, crisp footwork styling, but always allowing room to breathe, which gives you style and elegance.

Less clutter allows for more confidence. Confidence comes from knowing where you're going.

**Balance!**



#### **4) Balance - Your Hidden Superpower**

Fred Astaire never looked hurried, messy or off-centre because he had impeccable balance. Freeze him mid-spin and he still looks like a sculpture.

I often see dancers who lose control, wobble, or fall out of a turn. The solution isn't more patterns, it's better balance.

##### **Try this:**

Practise shifting your weight fully from foot to foot.

Stack head over ribs, over hips, over standing foot.

Add challenges: Whilst your weight is fully on one leg, lift the other or move your arms. Dance patterns alone and freeze anywhere without losing your balance or

good posture.

A fun daily drill:

**Stand on one leg while brushing your teeth, too easy? Try eyes closed.**

(Proceed with caution. And maybe skip the flossing.)

## **5) Coordination & Connection - The Feel of the Dance**

Plenty of brilliant musicians step into a dance class and suddenly look like they've never heard a beat before.

Why?

Because dance asks you to multitask rhythm, timing, posture, weight shifts, arms, legs, decisions and communication - *all at once*.

Today's dancers often wrestle with tension ("I feel stiff"), worry ("Am I boring you?") and uncertainty ("Am I doing this right?").

Dancing well is less about the moves and is more about being **toned yet relaxed**, clear yet gentle - firm enough to communicate but soft enough to make your partner feel comfortable.

### **Try this:**

**Leads:** begin all movement from your core, never just the arm. Give only the energy required - no more!

**Follows:** match the energy, don't amplify it. When you feel a push or pull, move your whole body, not just the limb receiving the signal. I would also add: Respond like a Ferrari, not a 1960s Lada.

Treat each other like crystal, not sporting equipment.

Smoothness over strength. Sensitivity over force.

### **And There You Have It**

Five deceptively simple tools: attention, conversation, simplicity, balance and coordinated connection.

Work on mastering these and everything else becomes easier, freer and far more joyful.

Swing dancing has always been about two people creating something unique together. Let these tips guide you toward dances that feel not only better, but more *organic and alive*.

## Happy dancing!

- Got a question about Swing dance you would like me to discuss in a future Swing Notes? **Ask me anything!** Technical, topical or historical, email [mail@swingdanceuk.com](mailto:mail@swingdanceuk.com)
- Need help with your dancing? **Send in a video of your dancing** then book an online Zoom private session, email [simon@swingdanceuk.com](mailto:simon@swingdanceuk.com)
- Book Simon for a weekend workshop or your festival, email [simon@swingdanceuk.com](mailto:simon@swingdanceuk.com)

Your partner in learning to dance

Swingcerely yours,

Simon & Anna Selmon

Sharing the Lindy love

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