

The Act of Dancing

Two left feet make no difference
at Eugene's Arthur Murray Dance Studio.



Courtesy of Arthur Murray Dance Studio

No one ever really thinks about the simple act of walking — the placement of the feet, the forward motion, the rise and fall of the body. And most people don't realize how easily the act of walking, with the addition of musical accompaniment, can be transposed into the act of dancing.

Put people on the dance floor and their poise, agility and self-confidence often will deteriorate into awkward blundering and apprehensive self-consciousness.

It doesn't have to be that way, however, according to Bud Ames, the owner of the Arthur Murray Dance Studio in Eugene. Everyone can be taught to dance, he says.

"I've heard many people say, 'I have two left feet (or two right feet). I can't learn to dance.' That's not true. Because if they have two left feet and they're walking, they can be taught to dance just as easily on those two left feet."

It's just a matter of technique, pattern and style, he says.

"Technique is how you use

your feet, and pattern is basically where you place your feet. You can walk the pattern mechanically, but the technique wouldn't look great," Ames says. "Foot technique is the fact that when you take your forward step, it is called heel-toe, and toe, toe-heel — this is waltz-wise — and then when you're going back it's toe-heel, toe, toe-heel. That's called technique or footwork, not foot positions."

The technique of toe-heel, toe-heel, etc., is what gives you the proper rise and fall in the dance, he adds.

But technique, pattern and style all are interrelated, says Ames, a dance instructor of 22 years. Probably the most important thing as far as the ultimate end in dancing is style. "Directional movement is important, but what really represents the dance is style."

"Style is dancing to the melodies — and that's expression. And dancing to the beat is your mechanical pattern; that keeps your timing, that is, the timing for the direction of your

pattern."

And that's what makes the difference between dances — the swing, tango, fox trot, cha-cha, samba, mambo, polka, waltz, etc., he says. "All these dances have their own personality, their own style."

The Arthur Murray method of teaching dance was created by Murray, who first began teaching in New York in 1912. He expanded into the mail-order business in the early 1920s by using kinetoscopes, or toy moving-picture devices, to demonstrate dance steps and technique. The business was a tremendous success until the little tin projectors started coming back for refunds because they had broken in transit.

Not long after, Murray attempted the mail-order business again — this time by selling an instruction book containing footprint diagrams, which later became an Arthur Murray trademark to define dance steps. By 1925, when he married, more than 5 million Americans had learned to dance by mail.

When magazine advertising became too expensive, Murray opened a studio in New York where he did a thriving business. His promotion of the dance, "Big Apple," enabled Murray to launch his one studio into what has become the largest chain of dance studios in the world. By 1946, when Murray incorporated, there were 72 franchised studios grossing nearly \$20 million annually.

Murray, who is now 92 years

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