

Acquiring Basic Dancing Skills

by Claude Sweet

Dancers of any age must begin by learning to skate edges and perform turns with flow, good body control, and posture.

There are no shortcuts to learning to dance. The following are my suggestions of how to become a good dancer:

- ❖ Learn how to skate prior to attempting to dance.
- ❖ Take group classes if they are offered at your rink. Ice Skating Institute (ISI) or Basic Skating Skills (USFS) class programs provide a good introduction into the sport of figure skating.
- ❖ **Master the basic figure skating skills associated with figures and MITF prior to starting to dance**
- ❖ Every dancer should be able to perform all of the basic edges on figure eights prior to attempting to perform half circles (lobes) at full power.
- ❖ Take a series of ice dance classes if your ice rink or club offers a beginning dance program.
- ❖ Group classes are a good way to acquire a feel for what ice dancing is all about without the expense of private instruction. Be sure to purchase a USFS Rulebook to learn the patterns of the dances. You should not need private lessons to accomplish this.
- ❖ Dancing on ice requires each person to have the reasonably strong solo skating abilities so they are not a hazard to their partner.
- ❖ Concentrate on learning the three dances in the Preliminary Dance Test, before moving on to more advanced dances. Become familiar with dance terms such as: swing rolls, progressives, and chasses. The USFS Rulebook provides has a section that defines these terms.
- ❖ Learn how to do the steps of the dance alone at first. Your instructor will demonstrate how the dance will be performed with a partner. It is important that you learn the various partner positions that are required to perform ice dances.
- ❖ Work on mastering basic Three and Mohawks, turns, in clockwise and counterclockwise and in both forward and backward directions.
- ❖ It is important to learn how to stroke like an ice dancer. Start out right by learning to skate with your head up. Dancers bend their knees when they stroke each edge. Their core body is always over their skating foot. This quality will make you a better free skater when the erect

posture is transferred into singles, pairs, and synchronized skating events.

- ❖ Practice stroking to different musical tempos and rhythms. Skaters must acquire the ability to express the character of different types of dances such as waltzes, marches, tangos, foxtrots etc.

When I competed in dance in the early 1960's, I trained at the Valley Forge FSC, the Broadmoor FSC, and the Los Angeles FSC. There was one or more dance sessions every night of the week somewhere in the Los Angeles area.

Dance judges actively skated on these 90-minute dance sessions along with National competitors in Junior and Senior dance events. Dancers ranged from their mid 20's to some who were well into their mid 30's to early 40's. It was common to see 10 to 12 national dance champions skating on a Wednesday evening dance session at the Pickwick Ice Arena in Burbank, CA.

My wife and I are dance judges and we frequently lament that skaters today, who are just starting to learn to dance, are handicapped by the lack of structured dance sessions. This is where beginning through novice dancers could see excellent examples compulsory dances skated with flow, unison, depth of edge, and the ability to express the different dance tempos.

Today, Southern California clubs rarely hold dance sessions. At the San Diego FSC, dancers come in for early practice sessions that start before 5:00 a.m. and they continue to skate until single skaters make it too hazardous to practice either solo or pair dance patterns.

While coaches can request dance music and other skaters take care to give them the right of way on the ice, it is not the same as unobstructed ice on a dance session. In addition, the skaters don't have an opportunity to see and attempt to strive to achieve a level of dance edges and steps demonstrated by more accomplished dancers.

The ISU has produced an excellent video of the Pre-Silver through the International dances. Unfortunately, the Preliminary through Bronze dances are not included in the ISU dance structure. Until recently there has not been a video or DVD that allows skaters new to dancing to see excellent examples of the lower dances performed by higher-level skaters.

In surfing the net I discovered a web site that features an instructional ice dance DVD produced by Sharper Edge Productions. It features national dance medalists Mike Ricigliano and Terri Levine. They demonstrate the Preliminary and Pre-Bronze Dances. It was a joy to watch them skate the

dances and skate with grace, style, edges, flow, and dance expression. I found it a joy to watch them perform the dances.

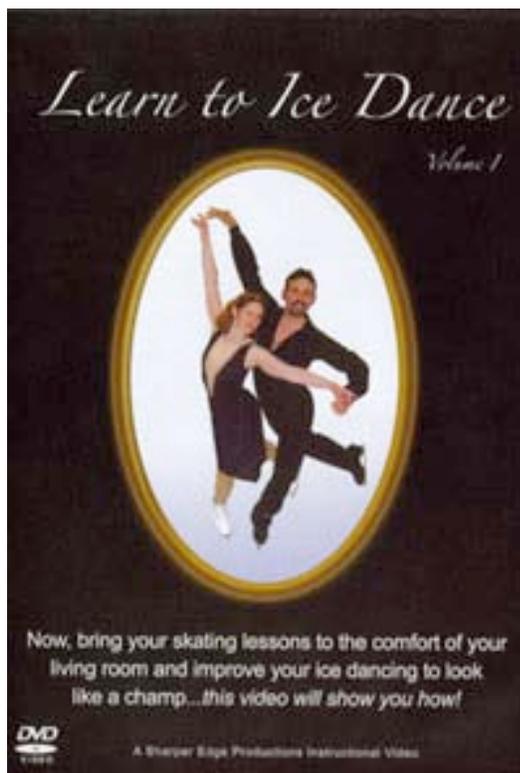
After reviewing the DVD, I am recommending that our Preliminary through Pre-Bronze dancers order a copy. I feel it will help beginning dancers to aspire to higher levels of performance than if they practiced in a rink without the benefit of experienced dance teams.

The DVD can also help skaters understand important areas stressed in the **Professional Skating Association Dance Manual** that outlines specific features judges focus on as they evaluate performance of skaters in tests.

The skating demonstrations are designed to compliment private dance instruction. The only thing that might be better would be the opportunity to skate on sessions with dance couples of a similar performance abilities.

The [Learn to Ice Dance DVD](http://www.icedancers.com/learn-to-ice-dance-dvd.html) is now available. It gives skaters interested in ice dancing a chance to see what it takes to perform the Preliminary and Pre-Bronze dances at a very high level that was expected when I was dancing in Los Angeles in the 1960 and 1970's.

The DVD provides a comprehensive demonstration on how to correctly do the steps of each dance, along with comments on timing, and the basic ice dance partner positions.



Learn to Ice Dance

<http://www.icedancers.com/>

Email address: Info@IceDancers.com

Sharper Edge Productions
9 Loren Drive
Queensbury, NY12804

Demonstration instructional video clips from the DVD can be accessed at <http://www.icedancers.com/learn-to-ice-dance-dvd.html>



Simple, yet elegant introductory strokes



Swing Roll



2nd step of a progressive sequence



Mike and Terri demonstrate a Slide Chasse skated in reverse Kilian Position



Kilian dance position. Man on left side of lady

Mike Ricigliano and Terri Levine have completed the standard gold dance test.

Mike has won the Championship Gold Dance event six times at the U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships. Terri was the silver medalist in Pre-Gold dance at the 2007 U.S. Adult Figure Skating Championships.