
Why Do I Dance?



By Richard Parker, Delray Beach

The twin Allison JT8D engines spun up to take-off rpm with an increasing high-pitched whine. Outside the Boeing 727-passenger window, I could see a steady rain beat down on the Miami airport tarmac, creating a mirror-like sheen highlighted by the sparkling lights of the terminal and planes against the black night.

I settled back in my seat for a short nap. The familiar sounds and vibrations seemed to have a calming effect on me. It was 1989, and I was on another New York trip to see some boring lawyers and bankers, but then to take in a ballet at Lincoln Center, run the reservoir at Central Park and always to see Amy Block (a former dance champion) for my International dance lesson.

I did not understand the compelling draw of the dance lesson, but I would meet Amy at one of three studios: Stepping out, Equis or the ABC ballroom on the Upper East Side. I would bring her tulips when in bloom (as was my natural habit), or, when available, a Magnolia blossom from my Central Park jog. It was just something I liked to do, and there was no boy-girl thing involved here.

"Excuse me", my fellow passenger stated, seating next to me - an elderly well-attired lady. "Are you a dancer?" she said, pointing to my copy of the USABDA Amateur Dancer on my lap. "Tell me, please, why do you dance? I have some friends in this and they are just nuts over it."

I looked through the window and considered this. I had never been asked this question. "Why do I dance?"

Thinking of all the possible reasons, a list tumbled through my mind:

- Because it makes money (NOT).
- Because I enjoy winning prizes (for some, maybe).
- Because I need to prove myself (not at all).

"Why do I dance?"

Thinking of my new amateur partnership in International style, the stress of performing before a host of spectators seemed initially to me as a great impediment, until I considered all the worst-case possibilities:

- A mysterious spectator would rise from the audience and shoot me dead with a 0.45 caliber automatic (No).
- The "Dance Police" would haul me off to jail for executing an improper heel turn (I think not).
- My amateur partner would file an assault charge against me for executing an improper spin turn (hopefully not).

Then, still looking through the window as the picture changed from the winking airport lights to the inky-black sky, I realized that there is something about the feeling of the music as it moves into your body and as your body moves to the music, expressing the mood and the melody. There is a poetic foundation here,



Richard Gere and Jennifer Lopez

seeking to work up from the inside to the outside in a manner that allows you to take what you see on the stage (as performed by others) and play it out yourself, (but seen by other students).

It is one of those few things in life where you can change a spectator sport into a participatory sport, and enjoy it at whatever level you are.

I am always astonished that although I can see imperfections and hesitations in my dancing on the videotape, when I am dancing "in the moment", there is no such perception. In the moment, the movement is sublime, the timing is perfect, the balance is on....

"Excuse me," my traveling companion said, nudging me on the arm and breaking the reverie, "I was asking you why you dance?"

Looking from the window down to the magazine, the answer came to mind. It was the same answer Susan Sarandon would receive from her movie-husband Richard Gere 15 years later in the movie "Shall we dance."

"I dance," thinking about the expression...

"Because it makes me happy."