

2009 UK Lecture
KEEP IT HUMAN
by Anne Laxholm

Our next lecturer is a lady from Denmark. And together with her partner, she is a former European Professional Ballroom Champion, with a title of lecture, Keeping it Human. Please welcome Anne Laxholm.

Thank you very much. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This week actually marks the 20th anniversary of Hans and my retirement. Yes, a long time. And when I go and watch competitions today, the first thing that strikes me is even before the couples to start dancing, I have to complement all the girls on their grooming. I think their makeup, hair, the dresses, it's never been any better. Even up to the amateurs, who used to take quite a number of years to learn, they look fabulous today. The boys are, of course, are also very handsome.

The second thing that strikes me is how many countries really have come into our wonderful world of ballroom dancing. Countries that we never saw in our time, in the 70s and 80s. Countries like China, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Estonia - I mean the list goes on a public stuff which I'm not sure I'm sorry - and that of course, is wonderful. Once the couples start dancing, the thing that strikes me there are, first of all, the big hold. They are moving across the floor, some would call it running. We'll leave that for the moment.

The complex choreography and of course all done in perfect phrasing. The minus, or the minuses, all the things that have not been focused so much on today I think, and I think that things are in danger of being lost is the swing, the beautiful feet and the lead and follow.

And I think it's very, it would be very easy for me to sit back in my safe seat every time and say, but That's no good, We can't have that because in our day, we did it so much better. Now I think it's very important here immediately to say that without development ballroom dancing will die.

And wherever there is development, there will also some times, some changes that may not be what we think are favorable. But I think at this time, what I will use to today's half of an hour to do is

really to take you back to the story, because I think, it maybe, time to look at the legacy of ballroom dancing and where it all started.

Now, of course, although I'm old, I'm not that old, but I was not quite there when it started, but I will try to give you a little impression of what I think and what I've been told and heard and seen that ballroom dancing started. It started basically with a man and that's a cue to my dear husband.

Hans, would you like to come and help me? Now, he's the man and I'm the lady. Or did you first bring on the music? Number 9, please? I'm not sure. With beautiful music, there was a man, there was a woman. Would you like a little dance with me? That would be lovely. How would you like it?

You know what? I stood no chance. I'd say anything in those days. So, in those day, it was just very quiet. And leading I'm going to take him into a Foxtrot, if you'd like dear, Only if you like, of course, I can't remember the step. OK, hold on. I'm leaving

At that point, there was no question from the Lady. Hans would not come up to me and say, Excuse me, would you do the step of Feather step, Reverse turn, Feather finish, Three step?

And I would say, We'll, I'm not really sure. But, no, no, take somebody else. We would just go in and we would enjoy the music together. Yes. Then, and this is probably back in 30's and 40's. When I came into the picture, or we came into the pictures around the 70s, then we already beginning to have, of course, we had choreography.

And could I have Waltz #5?

And I think actually training alone, practicing alone, and practicing also my choreography saved us a lot of times because I'm not sure when we were getting ready for a show we should dance it all together and we would have quite made it. So, very often, we would practice this way. It started with hands somewhere.

< dance >

So this is how we were always always begin to be practicing on our own we knew we wanted to memorize the choreography because it was going to fit some kind of show. Then we move on from

the 80s and now I would like to introduce a young lady to you. Tania, would you like to come out? And Tania is very nervous about this so if you could be nice to her.

Of course, there's no way that I would even attempt to do today's choreography. I think Hans and I probably end up in hospital. So, Tania is with her partner Emanuel who will associate in a second. She's an example of what is happening in 2009. And well now put on a Waltz, a piece of Waltz again. Would you like to do your choreography?
Thank you.

< dance >

Thank you very much, Tania. So, you can see it was truly lovely to watch, wasn't it? Now, my mind is, of course, I, a lot older, but really we could both say, Why do we need the men? We are perfectly capable. We can dance around the floor.

Every now and again come alive, it would be quite nice to have a man just to support us when we're a little bit nervous. But basically, we could all get by on our own. And that's what I think we have to be careful with the ballroom dancing.

We have to make sure that it doesn't end up to be syncro-dancing, the way we have syncro-swimming. Because we are not about two robots and I'm not calling Tania a robot. But we are not about two robots, we have to try and keep the dancing alive, being the man and the lady alive, and if we take just to go, Can Emanuel, can you come please. Emanuel. Thank you.
Oh, he wanted a big welcome?

Because of what time he has to go through, I guess, oh, we also in a small way have to go through. When you have a girl who is that capable of doing all her steps. What I think I see very often and I'm questioning today is when a couple starts taking her hold, the lady is so toned and so strong, so the first thing when they take a hold, she extends whole right arm.

And in many cases, already before they've even started, we've got this very, very straight arm. Which shows to me, well, I think is not feminine enough. I think you can be much more feminine, and the ladies, in many cases now Tania didn't do that now, but in many cases also to see, we used to, I think fall in love with men.

I think now the girls seems to falls in love with the hand because they actually, a lot of girls going up here as if they're speaking things like the hands are the one they are in love with. I would much rather have their bodies in love and they go up. And basically, I've got my side, my body is in love with him but I'm not in love with his hand. I in love with Hans not with hands.

So, if, if you take this strong look again, Tania will go and give the man the arm. And if we could have a little bit of Waltz. We are in danger of the dancing looking like this.

< dance >

Yes, of course, you should clap because that's lovely, isn't it? It's a very, very good dancing. It's very, very nice. It's two people that are perfectly capable of dancing and this is what you see, I think, in the right up to the top in today's competitions.

But somewhere along the line and I know this can't happen this all the time goodness knows we try from the beginning all the time throughout our career. But how many times can you actually really move somebody with your dancing? How many dance time do you sit and watch competition today and you can feel all the little hairs in your arms go up because you know you've witnessed something special.

And I know as I said. It's not something you can just spring on a partner. Well, it doesn't happen all the time. But I think what we need to bring back into the dancing is a little bit of this spontaneity and the man's role reversal, if you like, that is not equality of the sexes.

Once you put your dancing shoes on, it is still man and woman. It is Man asking Lady to dance. It is Lady not giving an arm, saying OK, come on, Sunshine.

But it is the Man saying still with his hand, Would you like to dance? I'm, not by giving my arm, nor by giving my hand, I'm saying, Yes, thank you. That would do very nicely.

And then, I know that you still have to have a lot of tone and I know you have to do a lot of things for today's dancing. But you need to try to keep that element in there somewhere. If you, would you now try to do that Tania? And a little bit of Waltz again, please. So, we have a Man. Soft Lady. Arms. Better.

<dance >

I hope you could see there was a little bit more softness there because it was more slightly more spontaneous. But of course, how do you bring it in your daily practice, because again it is not something that happens from one day to the next.

And in that way, I think, well, I know certainly because of my lovely partner, I was always brought up, even to today's lecture. I couldn't tell him anything. I said, do you just want to know? No, I don't wanna know anything. And that was basically that was me doing it to him, normally he would do that in our whole career.

I had never any idea what he was going to do. If I thought he was doing one thing, he would be bound to change it. And sometimes, it was a bit nerving and I have to say but I at the same time I have to really say that's what I would like to see the couples do much more of in practice.

So that means somewhere you go in every day to do your practice today. I know that you are doing a lot of the choreography and that's fine. We're not going to take away. But I think, when you go in and you are doing your exercise that you'll get ready and the next thing that should happen after this exercise would be simply doing freestyle.

So we have rule here Rule #1 saying. Emanuel, you are not allowed to do any of your normal combination in your choreography.

2. You are not allowed to speak. Tania is now allowed to speak, either.

3. If you don't lead properly, it's your fault.

So, could we have a little Waltz again, please.

And Tania, just enjoy.

< dance >

OK, thank you very much. Did you like that? And that is of course it doesn't mean that you shouldn't again have the choreography, but what you have to do is to put this kind of feeling into the choreography that you do rather it is very, very easy to forget. Especially I'm saying as a girl

because we are being programmed with all this choreography, and then just go in and pretend it never happened.

That Mans leading everything is very, very difficult. There is only one thing that disappointed me slightly. It was too perfect. Do you know I love it every now and then when you see a couple and they make a little mistake. Because suddenly you see this girls face just brighten up and I think that's the real meaning. That's what I really want to see. And how can you do that? And I'm sure if you dance long enough. And something probably would happen, wouldn't it?

Yes. And then, you would be, I appreciate it. But it is very nice. So, that is one way. I said when you go into the practice, do your exercises and get your body's ready and then do the free style.

Again just do, man and lady, Hans used to say about me was I need to shake her brain loose. Because he said it took about 20 min. to get my brain out. So, I could actually respond to him because this is another thing certainly in the style of, Ill call it our career, and also today, we all having to teach. In the days of Bill and Bobbie and Peter and Brenda, they didn't.

Well, certainly Bill and Bobbie and I think some of the other ladies at that time, they didn't teach a lot. And therefore, the ladies could be totally responsive we are having to be standing on the floor pretending, showing how the man should do and watch the man and dance as man. It's even more important. That we can put that aside when we come into the dance.

The other thing I think that I would advise the couples to do is, when you have a piece of choreography, I would say to Emanuel, Do a short piece of your piece of choreography. But I don't want you do it one way. I want you to do in three ways.

So, in another words, here we come a little bit into the phrasing, the phrasing was, I think it brought into ballroom dancing by John Derloy. And Hans and I only got phrasing into our dancing in the mid 80's. And it's funny now looking back because sometimes to see out dancing before we became aware of it and it looks really out of time, out of everything.

So, I think the phrasing is very good but I also think that we must still be the masters. We cannot let phrasing be the masters of our dancing because if we put it into such a framework that every time I come, it has to be 123 123 123. That might look nice first time, but it could be, I would say, 123456 123 etc.

So, that you have the ability to change all the time and although that we've programmes and choreograph that when it's done, it is in perfect phrasing. I don't think that you should, I think you should every now and then if the music tells you to, the Man should be able to break out of that.

And actually listening to the music, and then saying, well, I might come out on bar, 6 instead of bar 4. But who cares really? Because it's, we are not these robots that have fit into a system. So, can you please find a little bit. I've been trying not to tell you too much because then you would sit on the way in the car here and you would say to Tanya, well do that one and Ill do that way, that way, that way. I hope you haven't done that. Because I would like to see just a little piece of simple choreography but I want you to do in two or three ways, if you can. Some bit more Waltz, please.

<dance>

Yes, something happened, finally! I was just bent on wishing it to happen. I am so sorry, it was all my fault. Did you see the expression? That's what I want without the fall out. Oh, well do one more time, please. So something else. You can do with or without the fall this time.

Now, of course, watching that you wouldn't know it was free style because it all looks like - certainly to me, it looks like perfect choreography. But I think the advantage it has now Tania and Manuel are of course, very also very experienced in that but they are using a lot of free style.

And by using free style, it means the man has to lead. If the man doesn't lead, well, the lady is not going to do it, because she basically has no idea. What's going on. So, it's not something that's coming from one day to the next.

It comes over quite a long time, a lot of practice and I think that's another thing, that's important that if you want to be able to do something like that in a competition, and for it to be normal and for it not for the girl, all to be I don't know what he is doing. Then you have to do it in every practice you come in.

The other thing you can do, the last thing I want you to think about though, might be many more places, but the third thing you can do is when you have a fixed program, as soon as you have the program the choreography, well, I want the couples every time they go into the practice room, first

time they start it there, the second time they start it there, third time they start it there, the fourth time

It does not always start in this corner, and we go to a competition, and we got to the UK which has got a wonderful big floor and come Foxtrot, we have seven couples starting here and seven couples starting there. What happened to all the other space? So try to dance with the space, try to use it. And I think that way, if you have much more flexible minds, and that is of course is very much up to the man again.

It's no good that I ask I come as Lady and I say, OK, there's a space there. Come on. Can't you see that space over there? Because, otherwise, at the end I've already put myself in the driving seat. It needs to be the Man who is the strategy. And let's keep a little bit of, sort of the old world, if you like.

So, I think you know that it needs to me, the important thing is to keep the legacy that we have on the dancing. The actual story, the core of what dancing is, and then go on developing it. Every now and then, just to, to think when it's the heat of the moment, don't try to keep perfect.

It's quite alright, if something happens like that, I'm sure nobody is going to feel it's terrible. You might feel embarrassed falling on the spot it could have been smaller things it didn't have to be quite as big, but It could have been smaller things, but it actually makes somebody human.

You can see the human touch out there and not this feeling of, as I said certainly not perfect because there are many aspects over there, always need to get better. But it shows the human touch and I think that's very important. So for the men, you have to basically take a grip.

You have to go in there because power is not something you ask for. It's something that you take and you are from now on, you are going to be the minute you put your dancing shoes on, ladies allow the men and men go and take, take the lead.

And to all the ladies, I'd just like to read this little thing because I have been making fairly strong on the men today but I think as I said that is the main story that we have to keep it alive and to the ladies, I would just like to just say this which I'm sure many of you know. But I think it's the right day to say it today.

To all ladies

To be seen, and not heard.
To be seen, and not felt.
To be felt and not heard.
To be seen and not show off.
To move and not move away.
To be active but not to activate.
To have tone but not be tense.
To receive impetus and not give it.
To be balanced over your feet
To feel dance in your body
To follow, not to lead
To fit, and not be fitted
To let the dance infiltrate your body.

This was something that was written by a very famous lady called Bobbie Irvin. And I think that's what I would like for all the girls. It's very important. She was one of the icons of dancing. Certainly my idol of dancing.

And I think that's what you should listen to and let the men worry about where they wanna go. And I think what it could maybe also help to get better was the floor craft. Now we haven't got huge stage here, but were just going to see if I can get my old man off the couch one more time.

And no. Me. Sorry, sorry.
You don't get Taniya.

And were just gonna do a little bit of Foxtrot and we are going to try and do some free style and were just gonna see how we can actually, hopefully, move around the floor and not crashing into each other.

And actually being aware of somebody else there, but not going into them. So, can we go back to the Foxtrot, please. Thank you. Now get back up boy.

< dance >

Gosh, better than yesterday. Oh, it's my trousers. getting further and further down. Braces, boy,

braces.

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, on that note, I would like to thank, first of all, BDFI for giving me the chance to be here today. I think I enjoyed it. I'd like to thank Tania and Manuel for coming up in this. Days before competition is always a bit nervouring, I think.

Tania, specially for dancing on her own. Thank you very much. And finally and finally, to the love of my life after of 42 years together, I still love you. Thank you very much

(E&OE M. Kammoto)