



North American Same-Sex Partner Dance Association
Embracing and Welcoming All Dance Couples and Dancers

Articles from previous NASSPDA's Newsletters worth reading

Dance and Tradition
by **Stuart Nichols**

Tradition

Noun

The transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way.

1-A long-established custom or belief that has been passed on in this way.

2-An artistic or literary method or style established by an artist, writer, or movement, and subsequently followed by others.

Tradition [Def. 1]. (n.d.). *Oxford Dictionaries Online*. In Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved: September 13, 2015: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tradition>.

It would be impossible to practice our craft in any capacity without having some respect and appreciation for tradition. Our styles of dancing are defined by their traditionalism, so much so that it is hard to come up with an element, variation or even a stylistic gesture that has not been established, analyzed and codified by a previous generation of dancers. Tradition is our stock-in-trade. It is our product. If you don't have some love of tradition, this is not the profession for you.

Our traditions, to be sure, go well beyond artistic methods or styles, and extend well into customs with which we are all familiar: courtesy, chivalry, sportsmanship, grooming and attire in the dance world are all informed, if not dictated, by custom. Few traditions, however, are eternal; one tradition I rather miss is the one about drinking and dancing; I haven't performed those two activities at the same time in years, but I fondly remember the days when studio practice party night meant the bar was opened, inhibitions were lowered and money was spent.

Of course, there was also the tradition that one teacher (thankfully not me,) would have too much to drink and behave inappropriately, which was always a bit

awkward. Perhaps some traditions are best left in the past.

Which brings us to an important point: for every lovely, charming, heartwarming tradition, there is a Running of the Bulls.

You know what I'm talking about: that tradition in Spain where bulls are let loose to chase people down in the streets, resulting in bloodshed and mayhem.

Just because you've always done something doesn't mean it's not incredibly stupid. Or cruel. Or just wrong.

Allow me to draw upon an example from the dance business.

Most of us, at some point in our dance careers, experienced the weekly Champagne Guest Party. In case you didn't, or if you've forgotten, a Qualified Guest was one who was over a certain age, enrolled on an introductory Guest Special, and completed the lessons. Once those qualifications were met, the student who brought the Guest received a bonus lesson, and that student's teacher received a ten-dollar bonus. (The fact that ten dollars was considered a strong motivator tells you something about how long ago this was.)

On one such occasion, one of my students brought a middle-aged gentleman as her Guest. I use the word gentleman deliberately because that is what he was; immaculately attired in a three-piece suit, he was distinguished, courteous, well-spoken, and to all appearances gave the impression of being a highly-educated, successful professional. As expected, he enrolled on the Guest Special.

After the party, my manager drew me aside, and in a matter-of-fact tone, said: "Now you know, that man doesn't count as a Qualified Guest."

My naiveté was clearly annoying to her when I asked why.

"Are you crazy?" she asked, with an expression that made it clear that it was a rhetorical question; then, after looking around to make sure no one was in earshot, she leaned forward, shielded her mouth with her hand, and whispered: "He's *black!*"

I was truly naive, and truly shocked. Even though this occurred in a different century, the Civil Rights Act was already ancient history and had been in effect as long as I could remember. Even having grown up in Alabama, I honestly thought that racism was a thing of the past.

"What if he enrolls on more lessons?" I asked.

"Then he will be taught in the junior ballroom, where no one else will see him."

"But that's discrimination. Isn't that illegal?" I asked.

My manager put her hand to her breast and her eyes grew wide with innocence: "Well I don't mind," she replied. "I'm not prejudiced. But can you imagine these old southern ladies dancing at the parties with a *black man*? They'd never come back. We'd lose them all."

She had a valid point. It was then that I began to understand that the thing that is in the immediate best interests of a business, tradition or not, has nothing to do with whether it's legally, ethically, or morally right.

Some traditions consist of loving and painstaking efforts to replicate the artistic craftsmanship techniques of our forebears. Ballroom dancing is one of these. Other traditions are nothing more than social habits that persist, not through dedicated effort, but by default--because it would require effort to change them. These habits can be good, bad, or inconsequential. Some traditions, like refraining from picking one's nose while dancing, are in everyone's best interests. Others, like segregation, serve to benefit one group at the expense of another. Often, as in the case of my unwelcome Guest, these traditions of injustice are perpetuated by those who fear falling out of favor with those who benefit from them, while denying their own culpability. Whether they are, themselves, bigots, or simply pragmatists, is irrelevant; the results are the same. They are both ethically wrong.

Our industry was on the vanguard of prejudice when, well before it became fashionable in the legislatures of some states to attempt this, our governing bodies felt the need to define a couple as a man and a woman. Even though the Supreme Court has since ruled such states' laws to be unconstitutional, our industry has doubled down on its own rules, and those who have spoken out against them have suffered retaliation. Exceedingly intelligent, incredibly well-educated people from our own Society, people I like and respect and would never think of as prejudiced, have made elaborate and articulate arguments about physiology and bone structure and aesthetics to justify these rules.

This "Aesthetic Argument" makes the case that two men or two women dancing together is inherently unattractive, (a highly subjective assessment which I won't challenge for the sake of brevity,) and should therefore be discouraged. If we accept this argument to be valid, we should then also prohibit short men from dancing with tall ladies, turn away persons with disabilities, and ban overweight people, little people, clumsy people, and just-plain-ugly people from competition as well. Does anyone want to go on record and second that motion? No? Good.

Then there's the "Pragmatic Argument," which we've already employed to protect the white ladies from the black man. I don't doubt that those in our industry who are making this argument--that same-sex couples dancing together will alienate the mainstream market-- consider themselves to be enlightened individuals who would never discriminate against an LGBTQ person on the basis of orientation, and would be appalled if they were accused of such a thing. I'm sure they'd put their hands to their breasts and declare, with honest sincerity, that *they're* not prejudiced--they just feel such rules are, sadly, needed to avoid offending those who *are*.

This feels amazingly like the last century I lived in.

But it's not. This is the twenty-first century, and from a business perspective, it is short-sighted to exclude a broader market that is coming of age in order to cater to the prejudices of a diminishing one. Opening up our business to more people simply expands our markets, and any customers we lose because of their prejudices will be replaced by more enlightened ones; anyone who pays attention to public opinion polls will see the inevitability of this. Millennials couldn't care less who you sleep with or who you dance with. They see rigidly-defined gender roles as archaic--because they are. Adhering to them alienates an entire generation who, if we persist, will rightly view our industry as out-of-touch, irrelevant, and on the wrong side of history. One of the things that led to the resurgence of ballroom dancing as a popular pastime was a softening of the tradition of *exclusivity* in favor of more *inclusivity*, and I think this has been a good thing. Does anyone want to go on record and second the motion that competitions should return to their traditional

limitation to white protestants? No? Good.

We finally relented and let black people in, and--surprise!--the white ladies are still here! Only now they are joined by black ladies, brown ladies, big ladies and little ladies, one-legged ladies and Lebanese ladies and ladies who aren't ladies at all, but who knows? (Forgive me if I ignore the men; I just get carried away with alliteration.) Lovely ladies and gentlemen all, we should agree, regardless of their color or shape or who they're dancing with, and aren't we all the richer for it? Our traditions of elegance, refinement, courtesy and beauty have not suffered for their presence. As an industry, we should embrace the future as the enlightened people that we are, without feeling that we should cater to those who are not. We should continue to expand our inclusivity. It is a path that has proven to be prosperous.

So we've addressed the Pragmatic Argument and the Aesthetic Argument, which leaves:

The Pathetic Argument.

I call it this because it's the weakest of the three, yet it's the go-to excuse whenever someone wants to defend some deplorable habit a society has maintained for an inexcusably long time. It's just as lame in this context as it is when it's used to defend female castration in Africa, the caste system in India, or White Supremacy in our own country. This is the argument that *this* person shouldn't be allowed to dance with *that* person because of...*Tradition*.

To which I reply: *Bull*. (See: "Running of the...")

Let's get this straight. Traditions are not justified simply by virtue of their existence, and their status as tradition does not justify any injustice they perpetuate. Traditions that favor some by marginalizing others are, by definition, unjust. Like any other bad habit, we're better off without them.

Let me take this opportunity to remind everyone that The Imperial Society was founded in rebellion *against tradition*. Their interest was in reinventing dance styles which had become archaic and laden with irrelevant embellishment--hence the name "Modern Dancing."

Let me also remind everyone that, throughout much of its history, ballroom dancing itself was viewed as subversive and immoral. The act of a man dancing with a woman was seen, when it first appeared, as the height of indecency, and this perception continued through much of the twentieth century in the United States. (See old joke: Why don't Baptists make love standing up? Because it could lead to dancing!)

The very idea that two people could dance as a couple, outside of the control of the courtly group-dance form, was a shocking violation of tradition.

I would argue that having the courage to buck tradition is our greatest tradition.

Everyone is entitled to his or her own moral judgements, but let's not hide amoral indifference behind the hand on the breast while blaming the prejudice of others for our actions. Let's agree that beauty is subjective and that everyone should dance. And please, let's stop excusing bad habits by calling them traditions.

If there's a tradition we should be proud of, it is that of liberating individuals to express love and affection for one another through the medium of dance, *in spite of*

traditions that would prohibit it.

That is our longest-standing tradition, and the one we should strive to uphold.

Stuart Nichols
(previously published in 2018)

NASSPDA Inclusivity Statement

In light of recent aggressions targeting specifically transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folks in several states in the USA and Canada, NASSPDA wishes to make its position explicitly clear. We welcome all gender identities and expressions, including specifically folks who have transitioned or are transitioning and gender non-conforming individuals. NASSPDA has zero tolerance for harassment or discrimination of any of its members.

To create a safer space for trans- and gender non-conforming folk, we invite NASSPDA-sanctioned event organizers to implement the following actions:

Use each dancer's self-disclosed pronouns.

Provide gender-inclusive washrooms, or make reasonable efforts to reserve certain washrooms for all genders in venues that do not have them.

Similarly, provide gender-inclusive change rooms, if applicable.

Offer dancers means of reporting harassment or discrimination safely and anonymously.

Consider developing security protocols that address the physical safety of the event. This could include identification verification during registration, incident response plans at events, evacuation plans, maintaining lists of emergency contacts, etc.



Ron and Photis dancing International Standard at Paris Gay Games b 2018

Ambassador Program

In need of broader visibility, better promotion in the DanceSport world and advocating for same-sex competitive dancing, NASSPDA is looking to engage Ambassadors.

As many North American DanceSport organizations have changed their definition of a dance couple, we are witnessing interest and participation of newly formed same-sex, reverse role, and gender-neutral couples at their events. Many of those couples haven't been introduced or exposed to NASSPDA as an organization; hence, they also do not know the benefits of being a member of NASSPDA.

[Please use this link to access description and details as well as the application form](#)

(* please contact us if you encounter problems with accessing this form. A Gmail account login is required)



IFSSDA'S
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

DANCESPORT
VENUE
LARVA

TRAINING	COMPETITION/GALA	SPORT FEE*
NOV 4	NOV 5-8	1,600 : 850 \$ MXN : \$ MXN GENERAL : MEXICANS

*THE FEES WILL BE PER PERSON AND ACCORDING TO THE EXCHANGE RATE OF THE MEXICAN PESO AT THE TIME OF THE SPORT'S REGISTRATION.

REGISTER AT: GGGDL2023.org

CODE | JALISCO | GUADALAJARA

Competition Calendar

- **IFSSDA Sanctioned Competitions in 2023**

2023 World Championship at The XI Gay Games

From November 5 - to 8, 2023 in Guadalajara, Mexico

<https://gggdl2023.org/en>



New Guadalajara's Gay Games T-shirts are for sale.

<https://nasspda-logowear.myspreadshop.com/>

Free standard shipping

Oct. 3-8 on all NASSPDA Merchandise



Our website has a new look! It is up and running, so please renew your membership online.

Please check it out:

www.NASSPDA.org

Outreach and Media



**National Academy
of Health and Physical Literacy**

New partnership with The National Academy of Health and Physical Literacy (NAHPL)

NAHPL is a diverse organization that seeks to advance health and physical literacy in our society, especially in K-12 schools, higher education, and in dance and sport venues. NAHPL seeks to grow and advance professional leaders who will interact and network on regional, national and global levels to expand health and physical literacy opportunities for all children and adults.

As a member and mission centered organization, NAHPL encourages and facilitates active participation by all members, advocating for health and physical literacy.

NAHPL leadership and members plan and implement professional learning opportunities and events at the regional and national levels, and advocate for health and physical literacy in Pre-K-higher education and across society.

<https://nahpl.org>

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