

BALLROOM DANCING ANYONE CAN DO IT!

BY FERN HELMS
WITH JEAN LEBLANC



FREE STEPS TO
5 Ballroom Dances

WALTZ

CHA CHA

TANGO

RUMBA

FOXTROT

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Chapter 1

You Can Do It!

If you can count to four, if you can walk, and if you can tell the difference between slow and fast – then you can teach yourself to dance using this little book. Sitting in a comfortable chair reading the book won't help – you've got to get up and move!

Once you're on your feet, it's easy to read the instructions and follow the diagrams, moving your feet as the instructions say. Just walk through each dance pattern slowly, without music, until you can do it without looking back at this book, counting aloud or looking down at your feet. Now, add the rhythm, as noted by the words "Quick" or "Slow". When you've got that down, add the music. Once you've gained a little confidence, add a partner and a little practice. Now you can dance!



Getting Started

On the Dance Floor

The line of dance is an imaginary line running **counter-clockwise** round the outside of the dance floor. Men, this means that the center is to your left. For moving (or "progressive") dances such as the waltz, foxtrot or tango, it's customary to follow the line of dance. Not only is it common courtesy – it prevents collisions and pile-ups on the dance floor!

In "spot" dances such as the cha cha, it's customary to remain in the same general place on the dance floor throughout the number.

Leading

Men, you're the boss on the dance floor. This means you set the pace for your partner, navigate a proper course around the floor, choose the step patterns – and, of course, dance in time with the music. At the same time, you'll need to communicate with your partner where you're heading and what you want to do next.

How? With your body, **right** arm and hand. Your dance position requires a firm hold, so that only gentle pressure with your right hand at her waist is needed to lead your partner. A slight nudge to the right, and she will follow you in that direction. A slight pull toward you as you step back and she will follow.



Following

While you have less to worry about, ladies, your start is very important: in most patterns, your part is the exact opposite of your partner's. While he starts by walking forward with his left foot, you move backward with your right. It may help you to read through his part before beginning to learn your own, because yours will then make more sense.

Begin your backward walk with knees softened and body inclined very slightly back so that some of your weight is over your heels. Transfer your weight to your left foot in readiness. To begin, extend your right leg in a straight line from hip to toes and then lower it so that your weight falls first on the ball of your foot. Transfer your weight, draw your left foot back and lower your right heel to the floor, making sure it doesn't touch the floor until the left foot is opposite it.

Timing

Ladies, you should always step just slightly **after** the man. This delay produces a slight resistance, which is very important in leading and following. If you move exactly with him, the pressure is lost and there is no lead.

Closed Position

The most common position for ballroom dancing is the closed position: the couple faces each other about six inches apart. The man's right hand is placed firmly on the woman's back just below her left shoulder blade; the woman rests her left arm lightly on the man's right arm with her fingers on his shoulder and her wrist on his upper arm. Her left arm follows the curve of his right arm. He keeps his right elbow raised sufficiently for the woman's entire forearm to make contact (this is important in his leading).

He holds her right hand in his left. Even though elbows are raised, shoulders remain at normal height, and hers are parallel to his. She stands slightly to his right, so that on forward steps his left foot is outside of her and his right foot is pointed between her feet. Both look over their partner's right shoulder.

Promenade Position

The man's right hip and the woman's left hip are in contact, and the opposite sides of the body open out to form a "V".

Open Promenade

The partners are one step apart, with the man holding the lady's left hand in his right and palms turned down. Partners are opened out so that bodies form a wide "V" opening to the man's left. Free arms are held at shoulder height, palms down.

Now let's start dancing!

Chapter 2

Foxtrot

The Foxtrot is a smooth dance that travels around the dance floor. The long walking movements involve a subtle rise & fall action. Turning movements are similar to Waltz, but with a more moderate rise and fall, and more length-wise action.



Foxtrot is extremely versatile and can be danced to a variety of musical styles, but is probably best with slower tempo jazz/swing music.

The Foxtrot originated in the summer of 1914 by vaudeville actor Harry Fox. The New York Theatre, one of the largest in the world, was being converted into a movie house and added vaudeville acts between the shows. As part of his act, Harry Fox was doing trotting steps to ragtime music, and people referred to his dance as "Fox's Trot."

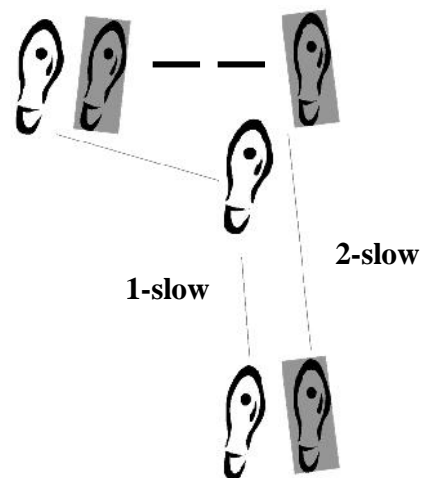
Foxtrot is danced using a normal ballroom-style closed position dance hold. The man and lady stand in front of each other, slightly offset to the left. The lady's right hand and man's left hand are joined in an upper-hand clasp at approximately the lady's eye level. The man's right hand is placed on the lady's shoulder blade or about her waist, with the lady's left arm resting easily on his right.

Basic Step

Man

In a closed position, man starts on his left foot, stepping forward for a slow step (2 beats), then steps forward on his right foot for a slow step (2 beats), then his left foot steps to the side left for a quick step (1 beat); then the right foot comes together for a quick step (1 beat).

Timing for the step: slow.... slow.... quick, quick.
Start below at *.

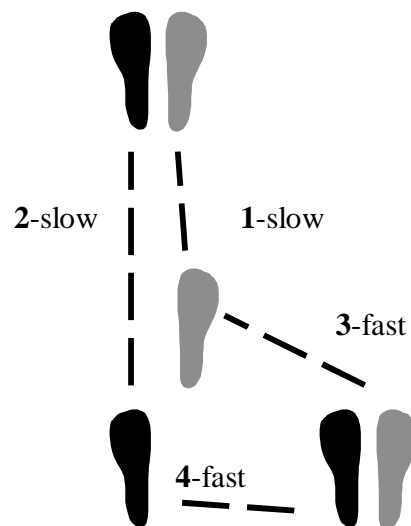


***Start feet together
(right foot is shaded)**

Woman

In a closed position, woman starts on her right foot, stepping back for a slow step (2 beats), then steps back on her left foot for a slow step (2 beats). Then her right foot steps to the side right for a quick step (1 beat) and then left foot comes together for a quick step (1 beat). Timing for the step: slow.... slow.... quick, quick.

***Start feet together
(right foot is shaded)**



Promenade Step

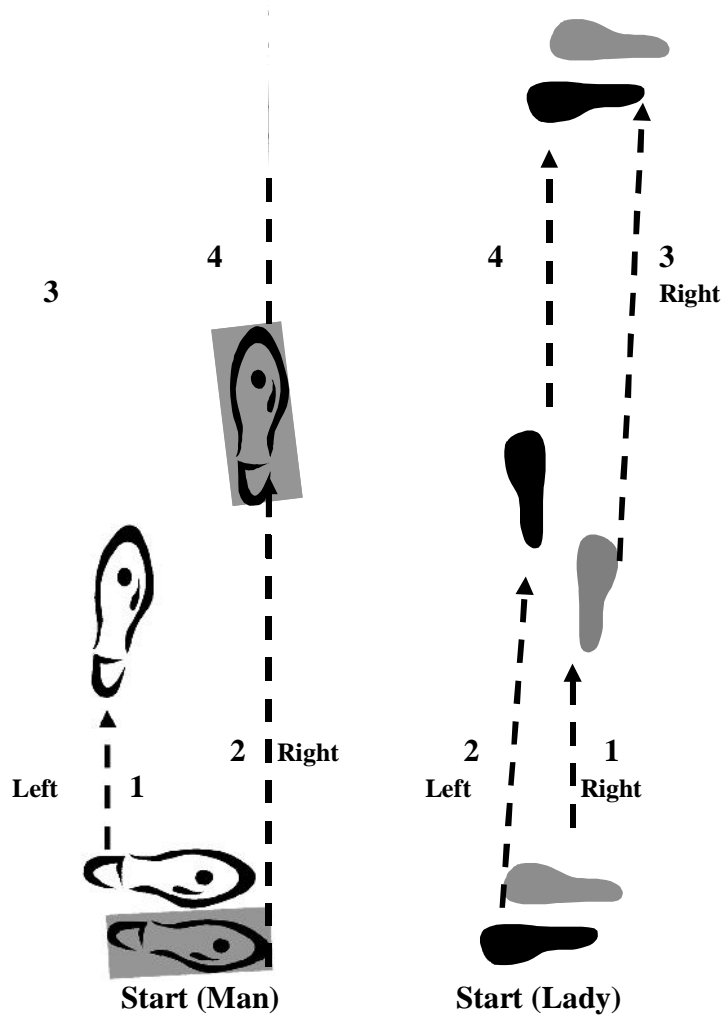
Man

In a promenade position (see following illustration), man starts on his left foot, stepping to his left for a slow step (2 beats), then steps continuing in the same direction on his right foot for a slow step (2 beats), then faces his partner in a closed position. His left foot steps to the side left for a quick step (1 beat) and then right foot comes together for a quick step (1 beat). Step starts in a promenade position and ends in a closed position. Timing for the step: slow.... slow.... quick, quick



Woman

In a promenade position (see following illustration), woman starts on her right foot, stepping to her right for a slow step (2 beats), then steps continuing in same direction on her left foot for a slow step (2 beats), then faces her partner in a closed position. Her right foot steps to the side left for a quick step (1 beat) and then left foot comes together for a quick step (1 beat). Step starts in a promenade position and ends in a closed position. Timing for the step: slow.... slow.... quick, quick.



(right foot is shaded)

Chapter 3

The Tango

"The Tango is the easiest dance. If you make a mistake and get tangled up, you just Tango on." (Al Pacino in *The Scent of a Woman*.)

The Tango can be as easy – or as complicated – as you want to make it. There are several varieties of steps that can be included, and you'll want to add more as you go along.

Probably the dance with the most colorful history, the Tango originated in either Spain or Morocco, but was introduced to the New World by Spanish settlers. At that time, it was a solo dance performed by the woman. Later in the 19th century, the Tango was done by one or two couples walking together, using castanets – but its music and moves were too flirtatious – and therefore immoral!

As the story goes, the Argentine Tango started with the gauchos (cowboys) of Argentina, riding in straight from the ranchos to the local dances – without the benefit of a shower. For their own protection from the smell, the ladies would dance in the crook of the man's right arm, holding her head back. She kept her right hand low on his left hip, close to his pocket, looking for payment for dancing with him. After a long day on horseback, the gaucho could only move on flexed knees, and danced in a long curve because the floor was too small and too crowded for straight lines. Thus the Tango hold – and the position- for the Tango.

Music appropriate for the Tango includes American tango, slow foxtrot, rumba, or even some slow rock or symphonic music, as long as it has a slow, steady beat. Listen to the music and count the beats: ONE two THREE four, ONE two THREE four. The ONE and THREE counts mark the major beats of the music and should come about a second apart.



Ballroom Dancing: Anyone Can Do It!

Walking

The Tango uses some of the same patterns as other walking dances. Listen for the major beats on ONE and THREE, and step in place to those beats. When moving to the rhythm feels natural, begin walking around the room, stepping only on the balls of your feet – not your heels. This strengthens your grace and agility and will help you move faster.

Now practice walking backwards, taking longer strides than what may feel comfortable at first. Turn your head to the side so you can see (men, look left; women, look right). Your longer strides will keep you from bumping knees and adds to the graceful, cat-like look of your walk.

Tango Hold



The dance position in the Tango is almost an embrace. Both partners face the same direction (man-left; woman-right), so you're almost dancing cheek-to-cheek.

Hold your partner in a standard dance position, with your upper body straight and shifting your weight onto the balls of your feet. This will push the two of you very lightly together, helping you to dance as one.

Men, pull partner toward you with your right hand on her back. Women, place your left hand on your partner's upper arm just above his biceps and push against him. Both pull and push should be as gentle yet remain firm, helping you to move as one.

Extend your other arm (the woman's right, the man's left) to the side in the usual ballroom manner. Clasp hands, pressing very lightly into your partner's palm. This will help keep your arms from sinking too low or flopping around.

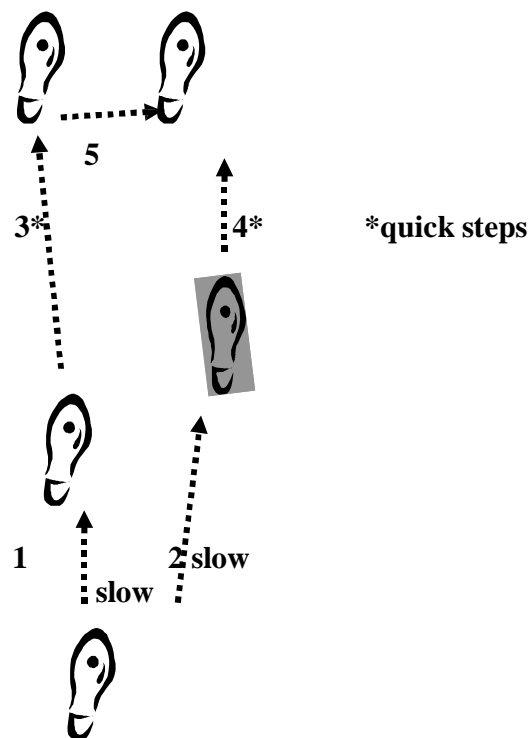
Now, with your partner, try walking in the Line of Dance – counter-clockwise around the outside edge of the floor, the man facing forward, the woman backward. Keep your head up and turned slightly to the side, staying aware of your surroundings as well as your partner. Then turn so that the man walks backwards and the woman walks forwards.

Basic Step: El Paseo (the Stroll)

Timing: Slow.... Slow.... Quick, Quick, Slow.

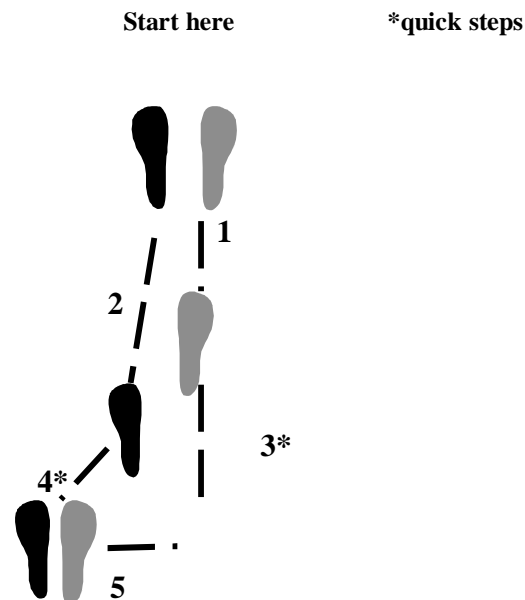
Man:

From a closed position, start on your left foot, stepping forward for a slow step (2 beats), then step forward on your right foot for another slow step (2 beats). Then your left foot steps forward for a quick (1beat), and your right foot steps to the right side of your left foot for another quick step (1 beat). Then pull your left foot to the right to bring your feet together for a slow step (2 beats).



Woman:

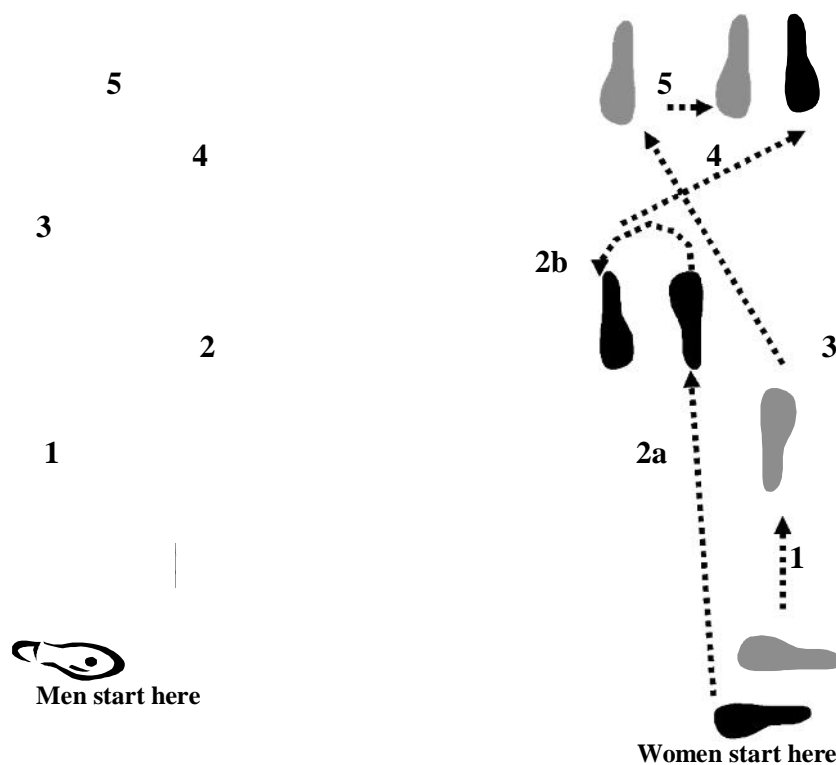
From a closed position, start on your right foot, stepping back for a slow step (2 beats), then step back on your left foot for a slow step (2 beats). Your right foot steps back for a quick step (1 beat), then your left foot steps to the left side of your right for another quick step (1 beat). Then pull your right foot left and bring your feet together for a slow step (2 beats).

**The Promenade****Man:**

In a promenade position, start on your left foot, stepping left for a slow step (2 beats), then step forward on your right for another slow step (2 beats). Then bring your partner in front of you; you're now facing $\frac{1}{4}$ to your left, and your left foot steps forward into your partner for only a quick (1 beat), then your right foot steps to the right side of your left foot for another quick step (1 beat). Now pull your left foot right and bring your feet together for a slow (2 beats).

Woman:

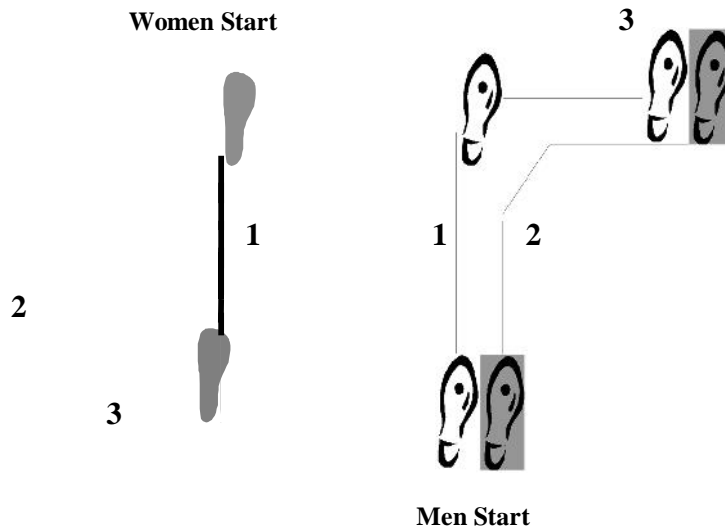
In a promenade position, step right with your right foot for a slow step (2 beats), then step forward on your left for another slow step (2 beats). Pivot on your left foot, turning your body left to come in front of your partner instead of to his side (your legs are crossed, and weight remains on left foot). You're now facing him, and your right foot steps back for another quick step (1 beat). Now pull in your right foot right to bring your feet together for a slow (2 beats).



The Tango Close

Women, step backward onto your right foot; bring your left foot near your right and step sideways with your left. Bring your right foot near your left to end with your weight on both feet.

Men, step forward with your left foot, bring your right foot near your left and then step sideways to your right. Bring your left foot near to your right to end with your weight on both feet.



Untangling the Tango: A few final notes

When you're ready to begin a dance – wait! Embrace your partner, but don't begin to move or expect to move right away. First listen to the music. Then focus on your partner so that you move in unison.

If you're leading the dance, wait a few measures to begin walking. If you're following, don't be anxious to start. Resist (just the tiniest bit) the man's efforts. This will actually help your partner lead you and make it easier for you to follow him.

Lastly, keep your head up and stay alert to obstacles and other couples. Occasionally you may bump into other couples – just smile and say "Sorry!" and resume your dance. Enjoy!

Chapter 4

Waltz

Gomez: How long has it been since we waltzed? Morticia: Oh, Gomez... hours. -- Addams Family

For two centuries the Waltz has been the best-known and most-beloved ballroom dance. But it wasn't always so. It originated in the country folk dances of Bavaria, and when introduced into proper European circles, people were shocked. A man, dancing with his hand on the lady's waist? And bodies touching, not held at arm's length?

The Waltz is a progressive dance requiring smooth and continuous movement along the Line of Dance. It is characterized by erect posture and "rise-and-fall": Beat 1 is taken with bent knee; on beats 2 and 3, both partners rise to full height on the balls of their feet. Take forward steps on your heel directly toward your partner. On side steps, both partners sway slightly away from their direction of travel (if you're stepping left, then sway right), taking long reaching steps and staying fairly close together.



With three beats per measure – ONE, two, three, ONE, two, three – the first step in each measure is taken with the opposite foot (LEFT, right, left, RIGHT, left, right). It takes a little getting used to, but it adds a graceful lift to the partners' bodies as they move.

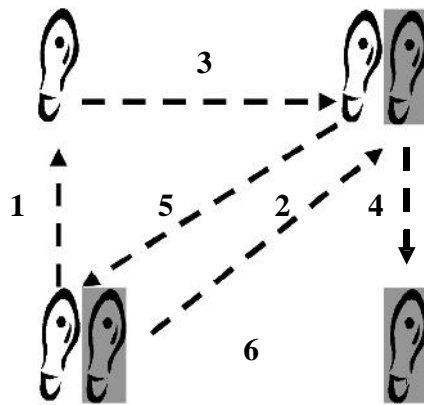
Basic Box Step

Timing: Quick quick quick. Quick quick quick.

Style: Rise and Fall (Beat 1 is down; beats 2 & 3 are rising)

Man

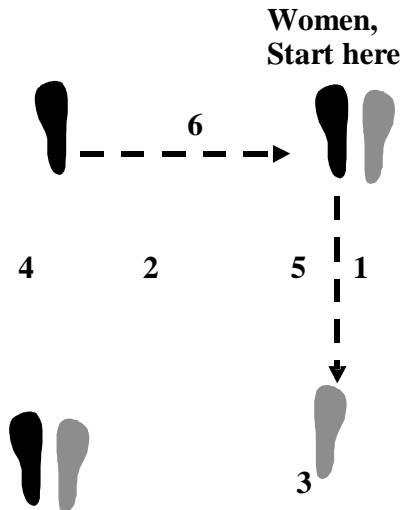
In a closed position, start on your left foot, stepping forward for a quick step (1 beat), then step your right foot the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat) and then pull in your left foot to meet your right for a quick step (1 beat). Step back on your right foot for a quick step (1 beat), then step your left foot to the side of your right for a quick step (1 beat) and then pull in your right foot to meet your left for a quick step (1 beat). This completes the box step.



**Men,
Start here**

Woman

In a closed position, start on your right foot, stepping back for a quick step (1 beat), then step your left foot to the side of your right for a quick step (1 beat); then pull in your right foot to meet your left for a quick step (1 beat). Then, step forward on your left foot for a quick step (1 beat), step your right foot to the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat) and then pull in your left foot to meet your right for a quick step (1 beat). This completes the box step.



Arch (or Underarm) Turn

Timing: Quick quick quick. Quick quick quick.

Position: Starts in a closed, then one hand hold, and ends in a closed position.

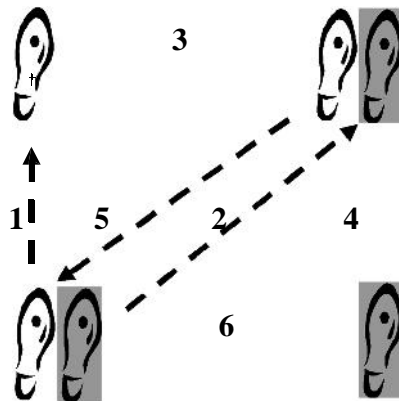
Man

You are going to complete two box steps during this turn. In a closed position, start on your left foot, stepping forward for a quick step (1 beat), then step your right foot to the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat), and then pull in your left foot to meet your right for a quick step (1 beat).

Now step back on your right foot for a quick step (1 beat), release your right hand hold from your partner and raise your left arm so the woman can walk under it. Use your right hand on your partner's back to guide her into walking the turn. Then step your left foot to the side of your right for a quick step (1 beat) and pull in your right foot to meet your left for a quick step (1 beat). She's still walking in her circle.

Now you start your second box step: continue with your left foot stepping forward for a quick step (1 beat), then step with your right foot to the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat), and pull in your left foot to meet your right

for a quick step (1 beat). At this point your partner is now in front of you, and you both come back to a closed position. Finish with your right foot going back for a quick step (1 beat), left foot to the left of your right for a quick (1 beat), and then pull your right foot in to meet your left to close for a quick (1 beat).

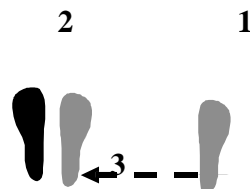


Men, start here

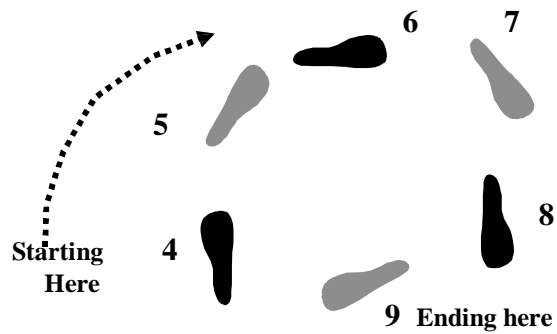
Woman

In a closed position, start on your right foot, stepping back for a quick step (1 beat), then step your left foot to the side of your right for a quick step (1 beat), and then pull in your right foot to meet your left for a quick step (1 beat).

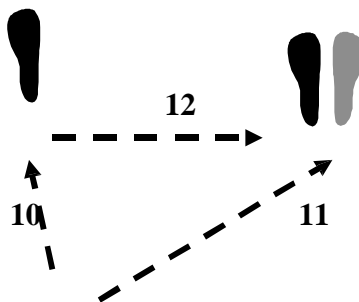
Start here



At this point your partner will raise your right arm up. For the next 6 quick steps (count 4-9), walk under his arm on the outline of an imaginary circle to your right, so that you end up in front of him after 6 steps. Start with your left.



Now step forward on your left foot for a quick step (1 beat) on count 10 directly into your partner. Step your right foot to the side of your left for a quick 1 beat and pull in your left foot to meet your right for a quick 1 beat.



Chapter 5

Cha Cha

The Cha Cha originated in Cuba, where some years ago the local musicians began chanting the syllable to compulsive triple rhythms. It contains both African and Cuban rhythms melding into a Latin beat. A derivation of both the Mambo and the Rumba, but purposefully slower, the Cha Cha was popularized in the States in the 1950s. The tempo is slow and staccato, a lot like a dramatic blues number. It is so much an on-the-beat dance that it's not hard to learn.

A couple of tips before you begin dancing: First, the music is in 4/4 time, so count 1, 2, then a fast cha-cha-cha in place of slower beats 3 & 4. Second, keep your footwork precise and sharp: this is not a smooth, flowing dance, but a syncopated staccato dance. Keep your shoulders quiet and your free arms at about shoulder level with palms down.

Basic Step

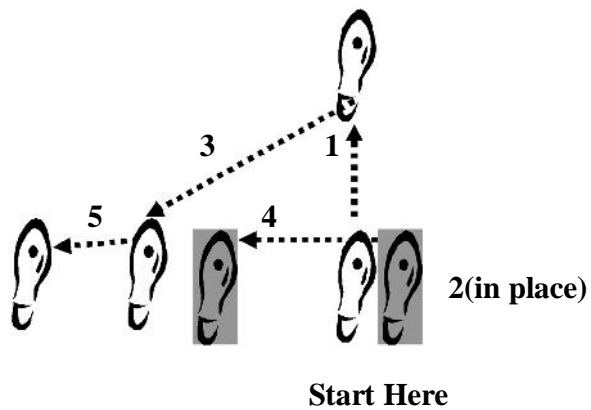
Style: Cuban Motion

Position: Closed

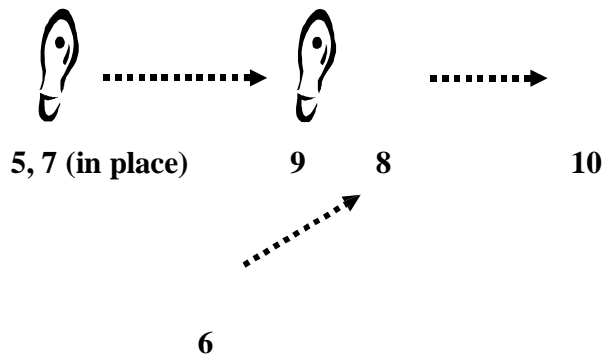
Timing: 1 (slow), 2 (slow), 3-4-5 (quick); 6 (slow), 7 (slow), 8-9-10 (quick)

Man

Start on your left foot and step forward into your partner for a quick step (1 beat) and then step with your right foot in place for a quick step (1 beat). Then travel to your left with a syncopation for beats 3&4 (3 steps in 2 beats of music), going side, together, side (left foot side, then right foot comes together and then left goes to the side).

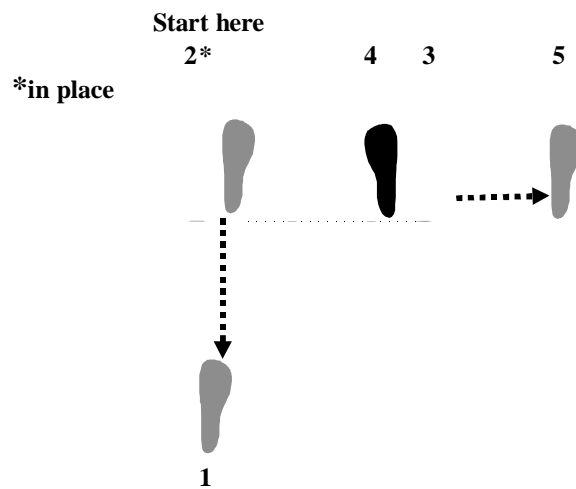


Now step back on your right foot for a quick step (1 beat) and step in place with your left foot for a quick step (1 beat), and then travel to your right with a syncopation for beats 7&8 going side, together, side (right foot side, left foot comes together and then right foot goes to the side).

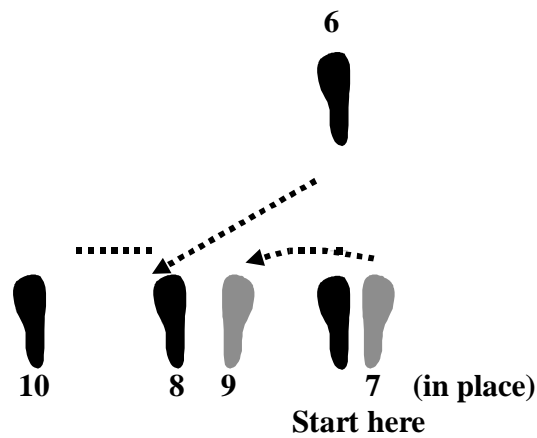


Woman

Start on your right foot and step back for a quick (1 beat) and then step in place with your left foot for a quick step (1 beat). Travel to your right with a syncopation for beats 3&4 (3 steps in 2 beats of music) going side, together, side (right foot side, left foot comes together and then right foot goes to the side).



Then step forward on your left foot for a quick step (1 beat) and in place with your right foot for a quick step (1 beat). Travel to your left with a syncopation for beats 7&8 going side, together, side (1 foot side, right foot comes together and then left foot goes to the side).



Progressive Step

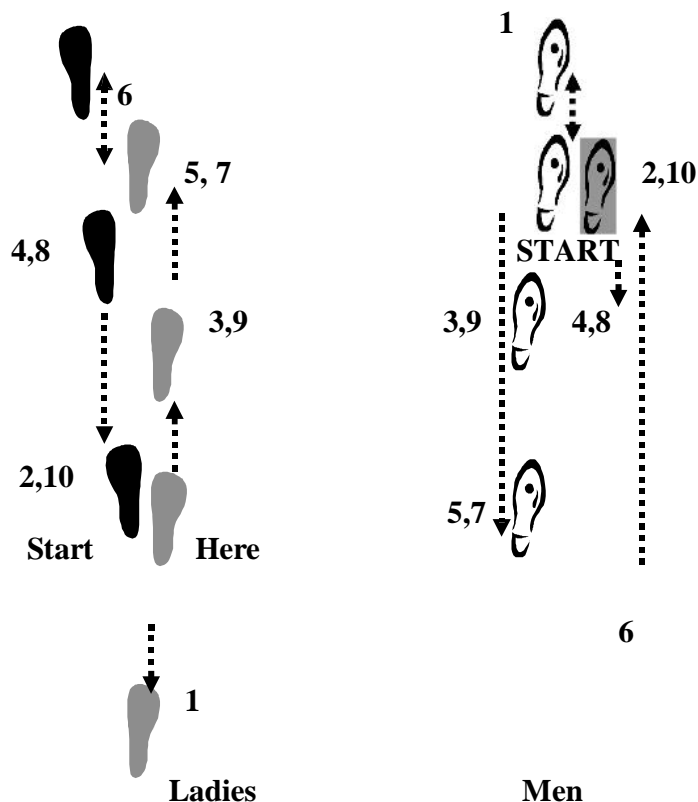
After the basic step, both partners release their hold into an open position. This is very similar to the Cha Cha basic, but instead of traveling side-to-side you go forward and back.

Man

Start on your left foot and step forward into your partner for a quick step (1 beat) and then your right foot steps in place for a quick step (1 beat) and then travels back with a syncopation for beats 3&4 (3 steps in 2 beats of music) with your left foot back, right foot back further and then left foot back even further. Then step on our right foot back for a quick step (1 beat) and step in place with your left foot (1 beat). Now travel forward in syncopation for beats 7&8 going forward on your right, forward on left and forward on right.

Woman

Start on your right foot, stepping back for a quick (1 beat) and then step in place with your left foot (1 beat). Travel forward with a syncopation for beats 3&4 (3 steps in 2 beats of music) going forward on your right, forward on your left and then forward on your right. Then step forward on your left foot for a quick step (1 beat) and in place with your right foot (1 beat), then travel back in syncopation for beats 7&8, going back on your left, back on your right and back on your left.



Chapter 6

Rumba

“The rumba is a vertical expression of a horizontal wish. You have to hold her, like the skin on her thigh is your reason for living. Let her go, like your heart’s being ripped from your chest. Pull her back like you are going to have your way with her...right her on the dance floor. And then finish...like she’s ruined you for life.” – Shall We Dance?

When the Rumba originated with African slaves in Cuba more than 400 years ago, it was an expressive pantomime danced by natives under the hypnotic spell of elemental music. Today’s Rumba has been heavily influenced by Latin music, and is best performed with flat feet, rising to the ball of the foot only when turning or pivoting. All steps should be small, and shoulders remain quiet throughout the dance. Most of your body motion will be concentrated in your hips in the “Cuban Motion”; free arms are held at shoulder level with palms down.

The “**Cuban Motion**” is the dance term for a subtle but expressive hip movement attained by bending then straightening the knees, carefully transferring your weight.



Here’s how you do it:

- 1) With the left knee slightly bent, take a small step to the side on your left foot, balancing your weight on the inside of your foot.
- 2) Gradually roll your left foot until your weight is on the outside, at the same time straightening the left leg until you feel yourself “sit” on the left hip
- 3) With the right knee slightly bent, close right foot to left foot, receiving the weight on the inside of the right foot.

- 4) Now gradually roll the right foot until the weight is on the outside, at the same time straightening the right leg until you feel yourself “sit” on the right hip.
- 5) Now repeat in the opposite direction. Remember – your hips should move only through knee action in a smooth and subtle manner.

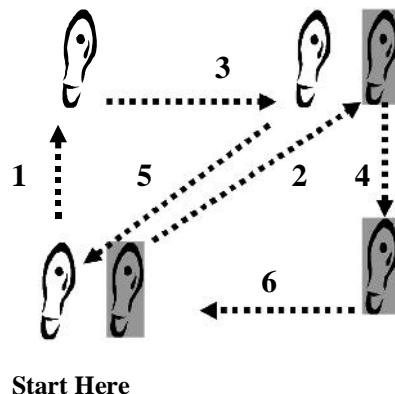
Basic Box Step

Timing: Slow, quick quick

Position: Closed

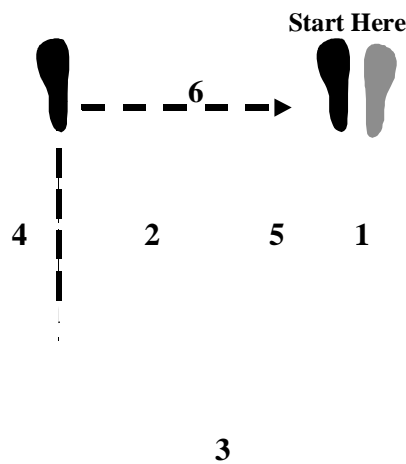
Man

In a closed position, start on your left foot, stepping forward for a slow step (2 beats), then step with your right foot to the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat), then pull in your left foot to meet your right for another quick step (1 beat). Now step back on your right foot for a slow step (2 beats), then step with your left foot to the side of your right for a quick step (1 beat), and then pull in your right foot to meet your left for another quick step (1 beat). You’ve completed the box step.



Woman

In a closed position, start on your right foot, stepping back for a slow step (2 beats), then step with your left foot to the side of your right for a quick step (1 beat), and pull in your right foot to meet your left for another quick step (1 beat). Then step forward on your left foot for a slow step (2 beats). Step with your right foot to the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat), and then pull in your left foot to meet your right for another quick step (1 beat). You've completed the box step.



Underarm Turn

Timing: Slow, quick quick

Position: Starts closed, then one hand hold, then ends in closed position

Man

Basically, you're going to dance three complete box steps as you lead your partner in her turn. In a closed position, start on your left foot, stepping forward for a slow step (2 beats), then step with your right foot to the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat), and then pull in your left foot to meet your right for another quick step (1 beat).

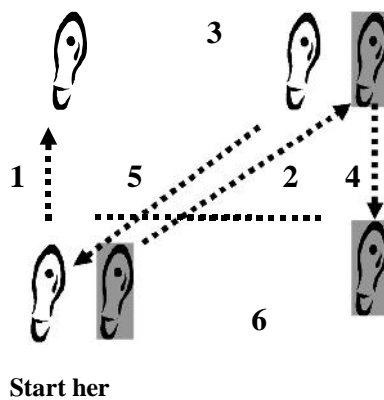
Now step back on your right foot for a slow step (2 beats) and, at the same time, raise your left arm so your partner can walk under it. Use your right

hand on her back to guide her into her walking turn. Now step with your left foot to the side of your right for a quick step (1 beat), then pull in your right foot to meet your left for another quick step (1 beat). She's still walking in a circle.

Now continue with your left foot stepping forward for a slow step (2 beats) while you're just in contact with her one hand, and step with your right foot to the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat), and then pull in your left foot to meet your right for another quick step (1 beat).

At this point, she is finishing her circular walk by herself and is now in front of you. Both come back to a closed position, and then you finish with your right foot going back for a slow step (2 beats), left foot to the left of your right for a quick (1 beat) and then pull your right foot in to meet your left to close for another quick (1 beat).

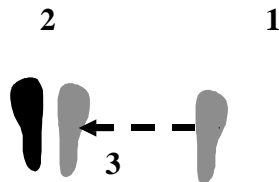
You will probably want to slightly turn your Box Step pattern to face your partner, making her turn a little easier.



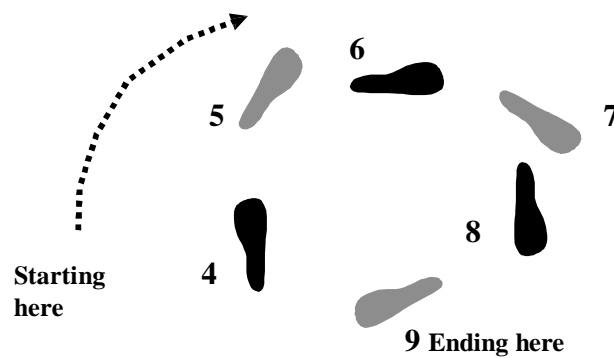
Woman

In a closed position, start on your right foot, stepping back for a slow (2 beats), then step your left foot to the side of your right for a quick step (1 beat). Now pull in your right foot to meet your left for another quick step (1 beat).

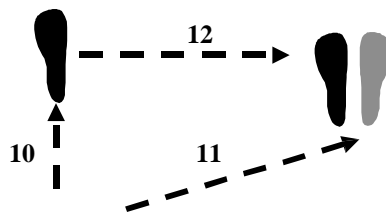
Start here



At this point your partner will raise your right arm up, and for the next 2 sets of slow-quick-quick, you'll walk under his arm on the outline of an imaginary circle to your right so that you end up in front of him after 6 steps. Start on your left.



Now step forward with your left foot for a slow count (2 beats) directly into your partner (back to a closed position), then step your right foot to the side of your left for a quick step (1 beat) and then pull in your left foot to meet your right for another quick step (1 beat).



Chapter 7

Start the Music

From our first junior high dance until now, who among us hasn't wished they could take their partner's hand and walk confidently to the dance floor?

You can. It only requires music, a partner, this book – plus a little determination and practice.

Like riding a bicycle, once you've learned, you've got it down – for life.

And once you've got it down, you'll be hooked. Dancing is an expression of celebration, and you can't help but enjoy yourself. You'll soon learn that the sheer pleasure of dancing – and the joy of mastering new steps, never fades.

So start the music.

And get up and dance!

About the Author:

While Fern Helms has many passions, near the top of the list is ballroom dancing. She “took her first steps” while attending San Diego State University. She needed a dance class, and Ballroom Dancing was the only one open in her time slot. She dreaded the idea, but soon fell madly in love with it. In the evenings she trained at her first Ballroom Dance Teaching Studio, Arthur Murray's in Hillcrest, and started teaching. “I've danced since I was a child: ballet, tap, modern and jazz, but never experienced the thrill I get from Ballroom Dancing,” she says. Learn more about Fern and her dancewear on www.saveondancewear.com. And experience the joy of dancing!