

Foxtrot Timing?

This is a compilation of information from a variety of source - written, video, & personal contacts. This information below is not meant to be absolute. Your experiences may vary - Chris & Terri Cantrell

We may appear to be taking a break from the articles on balance, but the issues discussed in this article are more easily experimented with when both of the partners are balanced alone and as a couple.



As we learn to dance we tend to think of our feet as the most important ingredient, but after the individual figure footwork is learned, the body plays the biggest role. Yes, we do need to move our feet in order to progress around the floor, but try to think of dancing as moving your body and allowing your feet to keep up.

On paper the basic foxtrot rhythm is SLOW,, QUICK, QUICK; [each comma (,) & end of measure semi-colon (;) represents a single beat] but the actual interpretation of the music while dancing is largely a matter of personal taste. The difference in interpretation typically is the difference in dancing with just your feet as opposed to dancing with your entire body. As an example, picture yourself as a spectator watching two couples dancing the Feather figure. First focus your attention on

their feet.

Couple #1 moves their body into position immediately and takes weight at the beginning of the SLOW count. You then might see a slight hesitation before they move into position for and take step #2 on the first QUICK count (beat 3). The flow is continued as the next weight change occurs on the second QUICK count (beat 4). *Looking at their feet only you say, "They are dancing the correct timing for this rhythm".*

Couple #2 delays taking weight onto their foot at the start of the measure and opts to start the measure by getting their bodies in motion first. They lower slightly into the support leg while moving their bodies in the direction they wish to progress, slowly rolling from the flat of the supporting leg onto the ball of the foot. Weight is smoothly transferred to the free foot. The free foot finally takes the full body weight at the beginning of the second half of the SLOW count. The couple continues the body momentum while moving into the 2nd step landing on the first QUICK (beat 3) and extending the movement by stealing the first part of the second QUICK (beat 4). The last step is taken about half way through the second QUICK count. *Looking at their feet only you say, "They are late and not dancing the correct timing for this rhythm".*

Feather footwork when starting in closed position (CP) with the man facing diagonal line & center (DLC):

Man: Step forward with the heel of the right foot (R),, forward with the ball of the left foot (L), forward with the ball of the R rolling onto the flat of the foot to end banjo position DLC (BJO-DLC);

Woman: Step back reaching with the toe of the L (use toe for all backing steps),, back R, back L;

NOW..... Look at both couples again, but this time look at their entire presentation beginning with their upper bodies. Couple #1 may be stepping on each beat with their foot and they may have continual body movement, but when focusing on their upper bodies they appear to be dancing ahead of the beat. Couple #2, when looking at the entire body, now appears to be dancing with the beat and taking advantage of the nuances of the individual piece of music. Couple #2 in reality is dancing the timing as HOLD, QUICK, SLOW./AND; (-, Q, S/&);. [♪You say 'to - ma - toe', I say 'to - mate - toe'♪]

Now you ask, "How do we get our bodies to do the dancing?" Listen to the music... Almost every dancer has a favorite song and choreography, the trick is to make our dancing mirror our feelings. Most dance music has a bass or drum generally playing the basic timing for that particular rhythm, but the other instruments and vocals

are free to modify the basic timing. So how strictly do you need to adhere to basic timing, whether it be in a foxtrot, rumba, or other rhythm? Listening to some of the great crooners of the past (Dean Martin, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr...) & present (Michael Buble, Harry Connick, Jr., Josh Groban, Diana Krall...) may help you in your quest. Do they sing on a strict tempo? Then check out a few musicals starring some of the great hoofers (Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelley, Cyd Charisse...) and watch their entire body presenting their interpretation of the music through dance. Now... listen to your favorite piece of music without cues several times, hum or sing along, and then dance the choreography trying to match the flow of the movement with the flow of the instrument or vocal that you like the most.

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