

Smooth Rhythm Technique

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The following ideas have been collected in order to assist you in comfortable dancing and are not meant to be absolutes. The body alignment for closed position in the modern rhythms (waltzes, foxtrot, & quickstep) is all-important in terms of dancer's comfort & confidence and may also extend to the ability to execute some figures.

BALANCE: The most important thing in dance is balance. If one person is off balance, the whole couple will suffer the consequences. Couples try to compensate for this loss of balance with very uncomfortable results: leaning, tugging, pulling, heaviness, teetering, hanging, dragging... Center your weight over your supporting leg/foot (the leg you are standing on) at the beginning and end of each step. A trouble spot for balance generally occurs on turning figures. When preparing for a turning figure we often see the men (and sometimes the woman) pull their topline (arms, hands, shoulders, and upper bodies) inward making the topline narrower and more compact, and lift up their shoulders towards the ears. Sometimes the man doing this also pulls his partner into him with his right hand/arm, thus pulling her off of her feet (making her lose her balance & as a result, she leans on him). This is exactly the opposite of what needs to be done to get body rotation and ease of figure execution. Couples need to relax their shoulders and keep their topline wide & open. One hint to maintain a good topline during turning figures is to take a deep breath and relax your upper body before commencing (or at the start of) turning figures.

BODY MECHANICS: Keep your body weight well over your supporting leg, this is more easily (& correctly) accomplished if you keep your feet offset from your partner's feet. From the man's right the feet should be in this order: woman's L, man's R, woman's R, man's L. Maintain a good top line (head to rib cage region) that is firm and toned but not rigid, that stable and wide with shoulders relaxed. Keep your head over your supporting foot. Keep your knees relaxed, never locked. Gentlemen, hold your partner with tone in the back of the upper arm (triceps) instead of the front muscle (biceps).

Shoulder Lead: The Shoulder Lead occurs when a shoulder moves in the direction that the figure moves.

Contrary Body Movement (CBM): Contrary Body Movement (CBM) is the action of turning the opposite hip and shoulder towards the direction of the moving leg, and is used to begin all turning movements. The simplest way to initiate CBM is to precede it by a shoulder lead. Then simply step forward or backward with no additional body or shoulder rotation.

Contrary Body Movement Position (CBMP): Contrary Body Movement Position (CBMP) is the position attained when either foot is placed across the front or the back of the body without body turn. For example, steps taken in Banjo (BJO) position should end in CBMP.

FOOTWORK: Below is an example of a forward walk in waltz and a three step in foxtrot. Step one of both movements for the man is identical, excluding the rise and ending body position.

Waltz Forward Movement Example, lead feet free (man-left / woman-right):

1st Step Man: Lower/soften into the supporting leg/knee (in this example - right) before stepping forward. Swing forward from your hip with your LEFT foot towards the woman (without rising) using the heel and roll onto the ball of the foot with a very slight rise at the end of the step. This results in the man's lead coming from below the woman's center of gravity (her hips), instead of over it (from his chest).

Woman: Lower/soften into the supporting leg/knee (in this example - left). Reach the free (right) foot, leg, & hip back with the big toe. As you take weight onto this foot, center your body weight over that foot/leg and commence a slight rise.

2nd Step Man: Step side and slightly forward using the ball of the RIGHT foot and continue rise.

Woman: Brush the left foot up to the right foot without taking weight (collecting – you track the movement of the foot prior). Continue moving your left foot side and slightly backwards using the inside edge of the left big toe/foot. Continue to rise.

3rd Step Man: Close the LEFT foot to the right foot, then lower into the knees slightly at the end of the step. This is a great place to check your balance.

Woman: Close the right foot to the left foot lowering into the knees slightly at the end of the step. This is a great place to check your balance.

Foxtrot Three Step Example, lead feet free (man-left / woman-right):

1st Step Man: Lower/soften into the supporting leg/knee (in this example - right) before stepping forward. Swing forward from your hip with your LEFT foot towards the woman (without rising) using the heel and roll onto the ball of the foot. This results in the man's lead coming from below the woman's center of gravity (her hips), instead of over it (from his chest). End in CBM.

Woman: Lower/soften into the supporting leg/knee (in this example - left). Reach the free (right) foot, leg, & hip back with the big toe. As you take weight onto this foot, commence dragging the heel of the left foot towards the right foot, no weight.

2nd Step Man: Step forward with the heel of the RIGHT foot moving onto the ball of the foot and rising at the end of the step. Begin a right shoulder lead.

Woman: Continue to drag the heel of the left foot with no foot rise until it passes the supporting right foot, then reach back with the toe of the left foot stepping back with no foot rise.

3rd Step Man: Forward with the LEFT foot onto the ball of the foot, lowering after the end of the step. Maintain a right shoulder lead. This is a great place to check your balance.

Woman: Reach back with the toe of the right foot, lowering after the end of the step. This is a great place to check your balance.

NOTE: The first step of almost all forward moving figure is taken with a heel lead. The following steps are generally taken with the ball of the foot (the most notable exception is the foxtrot figure Three Step, which has heel leads on both the 1st & 2nd step).

BACKWARD MOVEMENT: To begin a backward moving step, bend the knee of the supporting foot, lower into the supporting leg. Reach back with the toe of the free foot, leg, and hip.

A BRIEF BIT ON LEADING: In addition to the positioning of the arms & hands, a good lead from the man makes clear his intentions to the woman, who then follows. The first ingredient of a good lead is for the man to dance clearly & confidently. Clarity from the man is important, as it enables the woman to detect the speed, direction, and feel of a figure early enough to respond appropriately. Second, leads are a subtle, but clear, communication coming from the man's body, radiating down his arms, and then to the woman. Thirdly, the man should have "tone" in his arms, using the muscles in the upper arm to keep the arms in position and thus allowing the woman to feel his body movement. Avoid the notorious "spaghetti" (limp arms) and the "ram rod" arms (arms held too stiffly and generally with a straight elbow). The woman should not try to anticipate the man's intentions, but should wait to accept & follow the man's lead.

The man's arms & upper body should create a firm frame in which the woman is gently held. Both partners need to keep some tension (pressure) in the arms. A common complaint heard from the ladies is that the gentlemen are not leading. Well, guys for once it may not be your fault. What essentially happens is that the woman does not allow the man to lead. She interferes with the points of contact (see below) by flapping her arms, bouncing around, faking the hip movement, and not sustaining hand/arm pressure when dancing. The man cannot lead arms of jelly. Men, even if you are a beginner, you can dance effectively, if you stand erect and keep a firm forward pressure towards your partner.

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