

Wrist, Palm, and Finger Styling Ideas

Chris & Terri Cantrell

The following ideas have been collected in order to assist you in comfortable and creative dancing.

In “Arm Styling Tips” we discussed various techniques, styling, and pitfalls for the arms. This article will address ways to spice up these arm movements up by using the wrist, hand, and fingers. Developing the wrist, hand, and finger movement in conjunction with arm movement is where a dancer leaves the technical and enters the artistic. Please keep in mind that these are only suggestions intended help you on your way to developing a style of your own.

There are four main body parts that can be utilized in arm expression: Arms, Wrist, Hand, and Fingers. Visualize the fingers as being the eyes of a body, the palm as the face, the wrist acts as the neck, and the arm below the wrist as the rest of the body.

Arm Movement

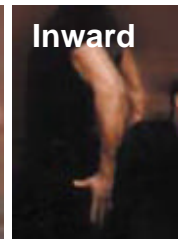
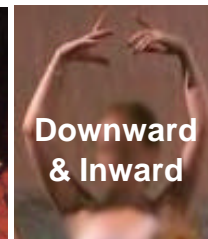
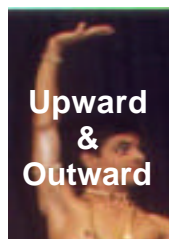
A few more arm movements & positions for you to consider. **Technical Point:** Unless for the very occasional ‘effect’, keep your arm through fingers in front of your body/shoulder line. Hyper-extending your arm behind your shoulder line gives you the ‘broken wing’ look described in “Arm Styling Tips”, does not form an attractive line, and can cause undo stress on your body (mainly in the neck, shoulders, and upper back).

1. **Up** – arms straight up or slightly ‘Ved’ above your head & slightly in front of your body
2. **Downward** – push arms in a downward direction in front of or to the side of your body
3. **Sideward** – arms move out from your chest and reach to the side of your body
4. **Open** – arms move out & up, out & down, in & up, or in & down using a circular motion
5. **Stretch Out** – stretch arms out towards the front or the side of your body
6. **Reach** – movement where the arm reaches for an imaginary item that is away from your body
7. **Inward** – move the arms from an outward position inward towards your body
8. **To & Fro** – move the arms from the chest out and return to the chest
9. **Fencing** – the arm is moved from bent elbow to almost straight arm, as in brandishing a sword
10. **Roll** – begin with arm outstretched & wrist parallel to floor, rotate arm so that wrist is rolled to an upward position
11. **Cross** – cross the arms so that they touch each other at the wrists, like an embrace
12. **Head or Back Caress** – arm bends at the elbow sharply, elbow reaching upward, as it reaches up over your head or shoulder to reach your back or the back of your head, e.g. like the action of taking an arrow out of a quiver
13. **Bent Elbow** – arm bends at the elbow sharply as in wielding a sword, striking, eating, or drinking
14. **Slightly Bent** – elbow is slightly bent, as in carrying a tray
15. **Touch** – arms move so that the hand or fingers can touch a body part of you or your partner, e.g. hands on hips, women place one hand on man’s chest, clap, over your heart...

Wrist Movement:

Wrists are wondrous items that can rotate in many different directions. There are five basic wrist positions. To turn these positions into movement means to start with one position/orientation and rotate the wrist into the next position/orientation. The ideal wrist movement is one that develops over the entire course of the arm movement until the final position has been reached. You can stop here momentarily or blend the movement into the next arm & wrist position with not stopping in between.

1. **Downward** – the palm faces down
2. **Upward** – palm faces up
3. **Outward** – palm faces away from the body
4. **Inward** – palm faces towards the body
5. **Sideward** – palm faces out or in to the side



Experiment with some of the movements below. Directions are written for your right arm/wrist/hand:

1. Palm downward → roll the wrist clockwise so the palm faces upward, as if presenting an item to someone
2. Palm inward at your side → raise your arm to your side → after the arm has reached the side position continue to rotate your wrist back to turn the palm outward, wrist will bend sharply perpendicular to the arm
3. Palm inward with arms in front of body (ballet 1st position arms) → stretch arms out to your side (ballet 2nd position arms) palms are now outward → roll wrist & arm down-counterclockwise to downward position (or roll wrist clockwise to upward position)
4. Palm downward & arms lifted above head (downward-inward picture above, ballet 5th position arms) → rotate wrist clockwise to palm face outward → continue rotating until the palm is upward
5. Palm downward & arms lifted above head in 5th position → bring arms down palms inward → rotate wrist counterclockwise to downward or outward position (or clockwise to upward position)
6. Palm inward arm down at your side → bring arm up to your side and continue until it is about at a 45 degree angle above the arm to the side position → bring wrist straight, inline with the arm (picture 2 from this section)
7. Palm downward elbow bent to bring lower arm & hand in front of you → shake hand at the wrist several times, palm still basically downward



Palm Movement:

There are three main palm positions available for you to combine with arm, wrists, and finger movements: **Flat** – hold palm upward keeping the hand and fingers straight/flat; **Cupped** – gently curve your fingers and the base of your hand gently up forming a rounded cup; **Narrow** – pull the sides of your hand in moving the fingers closer together to make your hand narrower than normal. It is generally more attractive and natural to have your palm slightly narrowed or cupped most of the time. A flat palm looks stiff and heavy and may give the viewer the feeling that someone told you to put your arm/hand there every time you do that figure and not that the movement developed naturally and looks like it belongs.

Finger Movement:

Fingers can also play a big role in making movements look more graceful and expressive. Not all of the fingers need to be doing the same action at the same time. In fact it is much more appealing in look and less stressful on your hand and fingers if you allow multiple finger positions at the same time. Different energy levels can also make a big difference in how natural and how characteristic to the rhythm the finger movements appear. Experiment with:



1. **Together: (2 or more fingers held side by side)** Hold the fingers of your hand together and snugly tuck your thumb underneath on the palm side. This presents a sharp line that looks very nice for men and ladies in rhythms such as International Tango and Paso Doble. Now try holding your three middle fingers together and allow your thumb and pinkie to spread apart from the other fingers (or just the thumb). For those closet Star Trek fans, try the Vulcan salute (Leonard Nimoy derived this from a gesture performed by rabbis as a representative of the 1st letter of the Hebrew word “shalom”, aka “peace”) – spread the thumb away from the fingers, hold the 2nd & 3rd fingers tightly together, spread the 4th finger away from the 3rd finger, and hold it tightly with the pinkie. Or for those others, remember when you used to make shadow animals with your hand; try a few.
 

2. **Spread: (2 or more fingers spread apart from each other)** Start by relaxing your hand and fingers. Notice how the fingers automatically separate. Now spread the fingers with lots of energy so that a few of them slightly curve up away from the backside of the hand and the wrist bends slightly down, while the elbows are fairly straight. Contrast this with a gentle, passive spreading of the fingers. The latter movement when the arm is held out to the side lacks something, but this same movement when caressing the back or side of your head (ladies) or touching your partner’s cheek looks and feels very nice.

3. **Curved: (1 or more fingers gently slopping down from the wrist, effortless)** Allow the fingers of the hand to gently curve downward (palm facing down) from the wrist and rotate the wrist upward so the palm faces up. Now add energy and it looks like you are presenting an item to someone.
4. **Bent: (1 or more fingers bent at a knuckle)** Experiment with bending one or more fingers at the topmost joint (1st joint), then try bending them at the 2nd joint, and lastly try bending them at the joint that connects the finger to the hand. Now flow from one position to the next and back again. More information on this below.
5. **3-Dimensional: (1 or more fingers on a different plane/line than the other fingers)** Start by allowing your hand and fingers to relax. Now push the thumb & 3rd finger down, below the line of the other fingers and pull the pinkie upward above the line made by the 2nd & 4th fingers. This 3D effect adds softness to the look of your hand movements.

Finger, Hand, & Wrist Exercise:

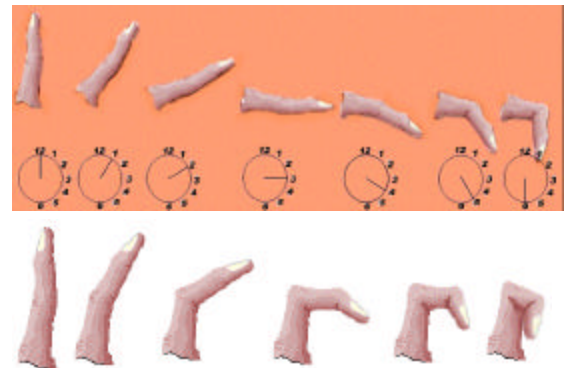


This series of five hand positions comes from the classical Thai hand movements. These work well as an exercise for the fingers, hands, and wrists. Gently flow from one position to the next. This exercise stretches out each area and is also similar to the type of exercises that are done to prevent, keep in check, and recover from carpal tunnel and its symptoms.

Finger Exercise:

There are several places (joints) where a finger can bend. Try moving one of your fingers like a hand on a clock going from twelve o'clock to six o'clock. This action mostly involves the joint between the hand and the base of the finger (also called the root).

In a similar manner a finger can have other bending/folding positions that come from the upper and middle joints. Each of these positions can be used with the various root finger-bending positions to create a wide variety of finger positions to use with the arm, wrist, and palm movements.



If you are embarrassed to try any of our suggestions or your own inventions out on the dance floor, start by trying them out on yourself in the mirror. Don't be embarrassed by using your arms/wrists/hands/fingers because they can add to the beauty and enjoyment of your dancing in addition to looking really good to the viewers.

© Copyright 2003 Chris & Terri Cantrell