

TO CLOSE OR NOT TO CLOSE, THAT IS THE QUESTION!

By Jim and Barbara German

Today's article responds to a reader's question: "In Rumba, what are the rules on how the man should take step 3 of various figures in order to signal certain leads to the lady...?" This reader is interested in how the man's step 3 aids in leading the lady through such figures as the Rumba Basic, Hip Twist, Alemana, and Underarm turn. This very good question required some intensive research to provide an adequate answer.

Rumba, in Round Dancing, uses two forms each utilizing quick, quick, slow timing. One is sometimes called the Two Step Rumba, Box Rumba, or American style Rumba and the man's actions are: Side left, Close right to left, Forward left; Side right, Close left to right, Back right. The second form is sometimes called the International style Rumba and the man's action consist of: Forward left, Recover right, Side left; Back right, Recover left, Side right. We have interpreted the reader's question to apply to the second source of figures, the Internationals style of Rumba, and the following discussion will address these figures only.

"Rules" generally are a short cut for understanding the action desired and once the desired action is understood, the "rule" becomes the quick reminder to the couple for the action to be completed. We will now look at the man's action and see what happens on step 3 of the figure. (While left open facing or closed position may feel slightly more comfortable for a specific step, the following discussing applies to both positions.) So, beginning in Latin Close Dance Position, man facing wall, dance the full Basic a couple of times. Now dance the Half Basic and stop. You have stopped after completing step 3 and the man is facing the lady with his left toe turned out at 10 o'clock. The lady is facing the man with her right toe turned out at 2 o'clock. This is normal and the lady is waiting for the man to indicate a lead to either complete the Full Basic or do some other ending.

STEPPING SIDE:

Let's change step 3 of the basic for the man by having him complete step 3 with his left foot pointing more toward the LOD with no left-hand rise. The action of the man's left foot has caused his body to turn slightly toward LOD. The lady will feel the slight body turn and will respond by turning her body and right foot slightly more toward LOD. The man has indicated to the lady an action that both will be moving toward LOD. The man now takes his right foot through the partnership into the following figure (i.e. Aida). The lady responds by following the man's right leg through with her left leg into the Aida. (This is an example where LOP or BFLY position may feel more comfortable than closed.)

ALEMANA VS UNDERARM TURN:

Instead of moving sideways on step 3, lets have the man close his left foot to his right. For discussion purposes, the man will be facing wall. The couple will have completed a full basic. The man will begin to lead a Half Basic but close his left foot to his right foot on step 3 and, most important, keep firm pressure in his left arm. The lady will be responding to three actions: the man's closing of his feet, the firmness in the man's left arm, and the light pressure on her left shoulder from the man's right hand. These actions indicate a feeling to the lady of not moving to the man's left side but turning RF toward LOD while the man still faces wall. In responding to the man's lead, the lady will complete a Hip Twist. (Closed or Open Hip Twist depends on the beginning dance position. From open, the man's right hand pressure will be eliminated.)

According to Roundalab [Standards for Round Dancing](#), the Alemana also has the man closing his left foot on step 3. This is the same action as the Hip Twist! Why? We were lucky to speak with people who remembered this figure being incorporated by Roundalab. It reflected a change that was starting to take place in Latin dancing. Latin dancing had become a "smooth" looking dance and was quickly reverting to its "roots". Within a figure, dancers were speeding up the quicks and extending the slows. This type of action, and the development of a more open dance hold, allowed Latin dancing to reflect its roots and incorporate many new figures. The current American champions, Bob Powers and Julia Gorchova, have demonstrated how speed, within a figure, can greatly influence the development of lines and create a "slowness" to the figure. With speed, more time, within the measure, became available to interpret the music and develop a personal style. Judges across the United States have watched competitions and agree with the look and style that speed of movement provides. Judges have evaluated Bob and Julia against

other dancers and have awarded them with the American Championship title for the past six years. How does this change affect us as dancers?

The Alemana is a two-measure figure where the man will close his feet on step 3 – the same as in the Hip Twist. The lady will follow the lead for a Hip Twist by turning RF on step 3. The man, on the “second half” of step 3, will raise his left arm to indicate a turn for the lady. The lady will now be able to complete the right face turn to face the man on the next two quicks. This provides the couple a slow to step side and develop some personal styling. To the observer, the Alemana will look slower since the speed initiated on step 3 with the lady starting her RF turn earlier provides more time at the end of the figure to develop the slow.

The question arises, “What if the man steps side, rather than close, on step 3 and raises his left arm for the lady to turn under?” Answer: “You have identified two figures: the Half Basic and the Underarm Turn.” Therefore, to execute the Alemana, in accordance with Roundalab, the man needs to close on step 3 of measure one providing the lady with a lead that feels like a Hip Twist. This will cause the lady to commence a right face turn on measure one before receiving the lead to complete the turn on measure two. The man’s closing on step 3 of the Alemana starts the lady’s turn early, which will create the speed this figure was intended to show.

STEPPING BACK:

Another movement for the man would be backward with his left foot on step 3. After completing a Full Basic, the man will start a forward Half Basic but will step back with his left foot on step 3 retaining a firm dance hold. The lady will respond to the man’s movement by stepping forward with her right foot on step 3. The man may continue into Back Walks. The firmness in the Latin dance hold is retained for both the closing action and backward action. When no body movement is felt, (i.e. the man closing his feet) the lady responds with a Hip Twist action. When the lady feels a backward body movement with the man’s action, she will respond by stepping forward.

THE RULES:

From closed or open facing position, we have looked at the man’s left foot action on step 3 of the Rumba Basic. The man can move his left foot sideways, toward LOD, indicating three different responses for the lady. (1) The lady will step forward on step 4 as the man continues the second half of the Full Basic. (2) With the man stepping sideways and raising his left hand on step 3, the lady will respond with an Underarm Turn. (3) With no left-hand rise but with a slight turning left face toward LOD, the lady will respond by turning slightly toward LOD into the following figure (i.e. Aida). When the man closes his left foot on step 3, he is indicating two different responses for the lady. (1) By keeping firm pressure in his left hand, and applying slight pressure with his right hand to the lady’s shoulder, the lady will respond with a Hip Twist. Or, (2) as the lady begins the Hip Twist on step 3, the man will raise his left hand indicating to the lady to continue her right face turn in the next measure (i.e. Alemana). And last, by stepping back on step 3, the man will indicate to the lady to step forward into the following figure (i.e. Back Walks).



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