



# Hip Twist Figures

by Harold & Meredith Sears

The Hip Twist is a Latin action found in Rumba and Cha (and other rhythms). We like to think of a Hip Twist as any sharp swivel on the weighted foot in the same direction as that weighted foot. So, if you were on your right foot, a hip twist would turn to the right. (A swivel in the direction opposite to the weighted foot is a Spiral.) Of course, not only the foot turns; the hips and the upper body turn too. A second basic feature of a Hip Twist is that the hips turn more than the upper body, putting a momentary “twist” into the shape of the torso.

## Open Hip Twist —

The Open Hip Twist begins in left open facing position or in a handshake, usually facing the wall. The man steps forward on his left foot on the first “quick” (woman back right), he recovers right and she left on the second “quick,” and he closes left with tension in the joined arms on the “slow” (woman steps forward right toward man, encounters the “wall of resistance” in his toned arm and so swivels sharply to the right on the “and” of the “slow”). Again, an important feature of this figure is that the Hip Twist is initiated through the hips and the hips turn more than the upper body. The feet may have swiveled to line of dance, and the hips might have turned all the way toward line, but the upper body lags behind, maintaining connection with partner.

The man can strengthen his lead and increase the sharpness of the twist and the degree of the twist in her upper body by making his third step a small slipping action not quite back to his supporting foot. His third step then becomes a small forward step on the left foot — maybe just three inches. A simple closing step creates a somewhat passive barrier, but a slip to a small forward step is assertive. He is telling her, “give me that twist,” her heart is aflutter in the face of his strength, and the connection between partners becomes stronger. Of course, by the time the next figure arises, perhaps a Fan, she will have mastered herself, and she will step away from him, straight down line. (If you find this last a bit fanciful, well — never mind.)

## Closed Hip Twist —

The Closed Hip Twist ends much as the Open Hip Twist does, with a closing step for the man and a step and Hip Twist turning to the right for the woman, but the beginning of the figure is quite different. As the name suggests, we begin in closed position, again often facing the wall. The man steps side and forward with his left foot and with left side lead (that is, he turns his upper body a little to the right) to cause

his partner to open out. The woman turns to the right on her left foot up to 1/2 and steps back on her right foot to end in an opening-out or half-open position, both facing generally toward wall. On the second beat, the man recovers right with right side lead, and the woman recovers left and turns to the left to face the man. On the slow count, he closes left to right with slight left side lead and right side stretch, and the woman steps side right and then sharply swivels 1/4 to the right on that right foot, her shoulders turning less. She draws her left foot to her right in a touch, raising her left knee and crossing it a little in front of her right thigh in a demure, sort-of Marilyn Monroe pose.

Notice that the lead for this Hip Twist is a little more sophisticated than in the Open Hip Twist. She is not stepping forward into the man. He is not closing or slipping forward to impede her progress and so propel the twist. Here, it is a more subtle left sway that first encourages her to open her head from the closed position of the second step, and it is left-side lead that then invites her to step a bit to the side and to Hip Twist to the right.



This is Rumba, and we know to dance these steps “quick-quick-slow,” but do you enjoy thinking about finer levels of timing? For instance, any Hip Twist can be danced “quick-quick-slow/and,” meaning that she takes her third step on the “slow” and then Hip Twists on the “and” of that slow count. The value of this level of analysis is that it helps us to separate actions that really should be separated. We don’t really want to take that third step and to swivel at the same time. We want to take the step and only when that is done do we want to execute the twist. This separation creates sharpness, a clean look.

I think we have hinted at some even finer levels of timing. What do you think of taking the first beat of the measure and making it “&/q?” The man shapes into his left-side lead and the woman swivels to the right on the “and.” *Then*, they step on the “quick.” The same thing happens during the second beat. They recover on the “quick,” and then the man shapes into his right-side lead and the woman turns back to closed position on the “and” — &/q, q/&, ...

Dare we further dissect the slow count? This step takes two full beats — 3, 4; — so a lot can happen. Roundalab says there should be a “delayed weight change on step three for woman and man.” We often dance the slow count in Rumba as a step on 3 and then a hold or pause on 4. Instead, let’s have the man shape on 3 and then step on 4 with the woman’s Hip Twist on the “and” of 4 — &/1, 2/&, 3, 4/&. We could even count four distinct things happening on 4 (and a good engineer or ballroom person could probably count still more). The woman takes a small side step onto her right toe, swivels right face (the Hip Twist), lowers to her right heel and releases her left heel, and then draws her left foot to her right with toe pointed and knee raised and crossed in front — &/1, 2/&, 3, 4/a/a/a (with “a” being about a quarter beat). This lowering one heel and raising the other shifts the hips sharply from one side to

the other and is a feature of every step we take — this is our Latin or Cuban Hip motion.

Thinking about partial beats helps us to separate actions and to create clean clarity in our movements. It also makes it easier to borrow bits of time from one beat and use that extra time to create, develop, and display bodylines to maximum advantage. The particular piece of music will suggest when to carry out the actions in this figure,



but you might want to ask, what is (are?) the “picture” components? Do you want to display the opening-out part during beat 1? We turned on an “and,” and we stepped on “one.” Try holding this display and maybe even developing a little right sway for the man and left sway for the woman, intruding into beat 2. Then we could recover and turn to face more quickly during the second half of “two.” The count becomes  $\&/1, a/2/a, \dots$

Or, do you think the Hip Twist pose during the “slow” is a more attractive display? Then you might dance the first half of the figure on the beat but get to the Hip Twist sooner and hold and develop that line. Sway on an initial “and” of count 3, step on count 3, Hip Twist in the first half of count 4, and develop the pose in the second half of 4. What do we mean by the word “develop?” This is very much a matter of individual taste, but you might extend the left rotation of her shoulders, lower a little more ... and then on to the next figure —Fan.

### **Advanced Hip Twist —**

In the Advanced Hip Twist, the woman does a good bit more swiveling than in the Closed Hip Twist, and of course the man should provide a different and perhaps still more sophisticated lead to invite those actions. Again, we begin in closed position. The man steps forward left toeing out a little and pressing into the floor. He lowers the lead hands and uses left side lead to cause her to open out, and the woman swivels fully  $1/2$  to the right and steps back on her right foot. So this first step isn't greatly different than in the Closed Hip Twist. The man steps forward instead of side, and the woman opens  $1/2$  instead of  $1/4$  or maybe  $3/8$ .

The second step is a recover right for the man and a recover left, turning back to face, for the woman. Where she could end this step in closed position in the Closed Hip Twist, she needs to dance the Advanced Hip Twist more into the man's right arm because her third step will be outside the man. The man needs to loosen or extend to allow her to dance to his right side.

Finally, the man steps back left, leading the woman to step forward right outside his right foot. He steps well under his body with a pressing or checking action so that his body weight does not fall back, and the woman too will check her forward step

and turn sharply  $1/4$  to the right. As always, the hips turn fully but the upper body and shoulders hang back and remain facing the man.

### **Continuous Hip Twists —**

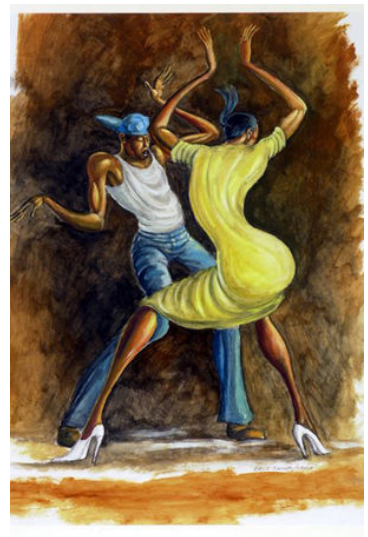
This is a two-measure figure. The first measure is an Advanced Hip Twist, and the second measure feels like a left Hip Twist for the woman and then a curving walk back to face the man. If you begin with the man facing the wall, at the end of the first measure, you will be in a tight L-position but with good upper-body connection, the man still facing wall. Now, the man steps side and back right with just a little left-face turn to lead the woman to step forward left down line. On the “and” count, she swivels  $1/2$  to the left to face reverse. The man recovers left and the woman steps forward R curving to the right. On the slow count, the man steps forward right turning  $1/4$  to the right, and the woman continues forward left turning to face man and line of dance and dancing into his right side, ready for another opening-out figure (e.g., Natural Opening Out or another Advanced Hip Twist).

The option exists not to turn as a couple but to end the figure facing as you began. The Rumbles do this in *If Tomorrow Never Comes*. Another option is to include one more twist in the second measure of the figure. You might step side and back right (woman forward left and twist  $3/8$  left), recover left and turn right (woman forward right and twist  $3/8$  right), and then forward right to face reverse (woman forward left to man’s right side and facing line). This is the form of the figure used by the Gosses in their *Rumba Concerto*, and it does feel more “continuously twisty.” There is the Hip Twist in the first measure, and then it feels like a left Hip Twist and then a right Hip Twist in the second measure.

### **Circular Hip Twist—**

Finally, the Circular Hip Twist is a complex figure that takes three measures and contains four different right-face Hip Twists. In a vague sort of way, it is one measure of Advanced Hip Twist and then two more measures of the man sort of vining in a left-turning circle and the woman walking, swiveling, and doing three more Hip Twists. But don’t dance this figure “in a vague sort of way.” Maintain a toned frame, a proud carriage with the body up and forward. Make your movements sharp, even a little aggressive. Sloshing around in a circle does not convey any kind of a Latin look.

Specifically, in the first measure, he steps forward left and leads her to swivel  $1/2$  to the right and to step back right. He recovers right, and the woman recovers left and swivels  $5/8$  to the left. Then he crosses left in back of right turning to the left, and the woman



steps forward right outside partner and does her first Hip Twist swiveling sharply on the ball of her right foot  $1/4$  to the right. This is the Advanced Hip Twist part, modified slightly because we are beginning to turn left as a couple. At this point, we are in a tight L-position; he might be facing line and wall, and she might be facing line and center. Remember, the hips turn more than the shoulders, so her upper body is toward the man as much as possible.

During the second measure, the man steps side right, behind left, side right (quick, quick, slow). His sequence is vine-like, but he should try to think, "7-11." Each time he crosses behind, he should try to place his left toe to his right heel, forming a "figure 7" with his feet, and each time he steps to the side, he should place his right foot parallel to his left to form a "figure 11."

Again, the woman's part is busier. She steps forward left and swivels as much as  $1/2$  to the left and draws the right foot to the left with no weight change and again the right knee raised and crossed a little in front. The count on her swivel steps is sort-of "1/a/a" (step/swivel/knee). She then closes right and hip twists  $1/4$  to the right (2&), and steps forward left on the "slow."

Notice that her left-face swivels are larger than her right-face Hip Twists. This is part of what causes the figure as a whole to turn to the left. The man is also turning to the left with each of his behind steps and so is leading her to follow a circular track. At the end of the second measure, we are in the "Hip Twist L-position," man facing about center.

The third measure continues the man's 7-11 vine and the woman's stepping and swiveling. He steps behind left, side right, and closes left. She swivels up to  $1/2$  to the left and closes right, swivels  $1/4$  to the right (this is the third Hip Twist) and steps forward left, and on the slow count swivels  $1/2$  to the left closes right and ends with a  $1/4$  right-face Hip Twist. This is certainly the busiest measure for the woman, with a count of "&/quick, &/quick, &/slow/&," We end in the "Hip Twist L-position," having made one full turn.



Ball Room Dancing.