

Left Side Pass & Freedom Of Expression



by Harold & Meredith Sears

West Coast Swing is a rhythm that is unusually flexible in allowing individual expression. In Foxtrot and other rhythms, we are expected to step exactly here, maybe heel to toe, with body sway in this direction, and maybe beginning to rise but not completely risen yet. Of course, as round dancers, the cues are only suggestions—we have the license to dance what we feel (within reason). But in West Coast, we have more license.

The Left Side Pass is a figure in which the woman walks two and then dances two triples, as she passes the man on his left side (1&1/2 measures total). We might begin in left open facing position, the man facing line of dance. He steps back on his left foot, drawing the woman forward on her right, toward him. West Coast is a slot dance, so he not only steps back, he also begins to turn to the left and steps a bit off the right side of the line of dance, so that the woman can travel straight ahead past the man's left side, and she won't have to curve around him or otherwise leave her path. On beat 2, he closes right to left, continuing to turn and to lead her forward down the slot.

There is not too much opportunity for individual expression on these first two steps. The man has to get out of the way and get the woman moving, and the woman has to walk on by. But let's look at the first triple. The woman is passing the man and is, essentially, running away. He will eventually get her back—you know, boy loses girl, boy gets girl again—but for now, she is leaving. The standard figure calls for moderate intensity here. On beat 3, she steps forward right and begins to turn to the left. On the "and" count, she crosses her left in front of her right,

turning to face line, and on count 4, she steps back right. Meanwhile, the man has stepped forward/close, forward, returning to the slot and completing 1/2 turn to face partner and reverse. We have trail feet free.

The woman's steps on beats 3 and 4 are known as a French Cross. Notice that the first of these steps, forward, and the third step, back, carry her away from her man, but the middle, crossing step doesn't progress much, and it turns her toward him. This is why we suggest that this performance is of medium intensity. She is "running away" with only two of her steps. If she feels more strongly—more angry, maybe more playful—she can leave him with all three steps. She can step forward right, forward left turning sharply to face him, and then back right. West Coast allows us to vary the figures to suit the mood.

And if she does *not* really want to leave him, she can reduce this little piece of the figure to only one traveling step. She can use beat 3 to simply touch her right foot and to turn. The man can encourage this more cozy action by tucking her in as he would in a Tuck and Spin. But don't spin her. Just let her step back right on 4 as usual, and he will step forward, following. This is a Left Side Pass that stays close and friendly.

Now, let's end the figure. The final triple is an Anchor Step. For both the man and the woman, it is a small step back and under the body with the trail foot, replace, replace, with a timing of 1&2, and here too the woman can express herself. She might cross behind with a little floor ronde and add extra hip sway and rotation. She is saying, you've caught me, and aren't you glad, and she can say it subtly or with a flourish. West Coast gives us the freedom to dance whatever story we would like to tell.

