

## Lesson 9: Understanding Components of Dancing

By Kaye West

When people have not had an opportunity to learn to dance, they can easily believe that they “can’t” dance, but the truth is they simply have never learned how! While it seems that there is much to learn (leading to an extremely beneficial life-long learning opportunity for anyone), the process of learning partnership dancing can be very manageable when one understands that there are a limited number of components.

Paul Zimmer (<https://cuedballroomdance.com>) suggests the first things to master are “the beat and the feet.” The “beat” refers to the rhythm, or how much *time* elapses between steps and whether or not it involves a *weight change*; and the “feet” explains *which foot* is moving, *how* it moves, and in *which direction* it goes.

### Components of Rhythm or Timing

In four of the rhythms introduced in this series (Social Foxtrot, Single Swing, Waltz, and Rumba) there are only two timing components: **Slow** and **Quick**. Cha Cha introduces a third timing component (the **Chassé**) which is also used in the Triple Swing. A **Quick** (Q) is *one count of time* (one unit). A **Slow** (S) takes twice as long, so is *two counts*. Sometimes dancers associate words with each of these patterns: a **Slow** can be symbolized auditorily with “BOOM”; a **Quick** is rendered as “tick”; and a **Chassé** is “tick/a tick.” Timing components require two counts of time in most rhythms; Waltz requires three counts.

#### Social Foxtrot and Single Swing (BOOM, BOOM, tick, tick)

1	2	1	2	1	2
Slow		Slow		Quick	Quick
One component		One component		One component	

Both of these rhythms have three *two-count components*. One component is a **Slow** which occurs twice, and there is only *one change of weight* for each one. The other component is **Quick-Quick** which has two changes of weight, one on each count. The basic pattern, therefore, requires six *counts* to complete. Each *word* represents a *change of weight*, so there are four changes of weight in this timing pattern. In all of the basic figures, one takes weight with alternate feet, so when facing partner, the Lead steps Left, Right, Left, Right and the Follow steps Right, Left, Right, Left.

These two rhythms differ in *where the feet go* and *how they move*. In the Social Foxtrot basic the Lead steps **Forward, Forward, Side-Close**; when facing partner, the Follow steps **Back, Back, Side-Close**. The Forward and Back steps are like normal walking. This pattern can be danced again and again, repeatedly.

When facing partner for the Single Swing basic both dancers step **Side, Side, Rock Apart-Recover**. The **Side** direction is substituted for the **Forward** or **Back** direction of the Social Foxtrot. When stepping to the **Side**, the body is slightly off-balance, so the opposite knee bends to achieve equilibrium on the second half of the **Slow** step. In the **Rock Apart**, both dancers take a short step *back* while *leaving their other foot in place* so it is easy to regain weight on the **Recover** (or **Replace**). It is like a back step but midway the dancer changes his/her mind and regains weight on the other foot. The **Rock-Recover** component replaces the **Side-Close** component in the Social Foxtrot. To begin dancing Single Swing, do the above pattern repeatedly.

#### Waltz (tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick)

1	2	3	1	2	3
Quick	Quick	Quick	Quick	Quick	Quick
One component			One component		

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The Waltz rhythm is danced in two components of *three counts*. Like the above two rhythms, to make the basic Waltz Box, dancers take six weight changes (since they are all Quicks, dancers generally use numerals to count the timing, so a full Box could be counted “1-2-3-4-5-6”). The Lead steps **Forward, Side-Close, Back, Side-Close** and the Follow does the natural opposite (**Back, Side-Close, Forward, Side-Close**). The six steps together make the shape of a square (box) on the floor with the Forward and Back steps making the sides and the Side-Close making the top and bottom.

Comparing the **first three steps** in the Waltz with the **four steps** of the Social Foxtrot, one can see that one **Quick** is substituted for two **Slows**, and the **Quick-Quick** remains the same. Notice that because there were **two** Slows (an even number) in the Foxtrot, the Quick-Quick begins with the same foot as the first Slow. With just one Quick (an odd number) in the Waltz, the Side-Close begins with the opposite foot. And, since each component has an odd number of weight changes, adjacent components begin with opposite feet.

Completing the full Box (six counts) allows dancers to begin the next pattern with the same foot they used to start the Box. One can repeat the Box through an entire song to practice this time-honored rhythm.

**Rumba** (BOOM, tick, tick repeatedly)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Slow		Quick	Quick	Slow		Quick	Quick
One component		One component		One component		One component	

The first pattern introduced in the Rumba is the Rumba Box (the Lead dancing **Forward, Side-Close, Back, Side-Close** and the Follow doing the natural opposite) using the rhythm pattern Slow, Quick-Quick, Slow, Quick-Quick. Notice that the *feet* move as they did in the Waltz Box, and also like the Waltz there are *two sets of three weight changes*. However, in the Rumba it takes *four counts* instead of *three* to complete a set of three weight changes (half a box). The timing is different! One of the Quicks in the Waltz (one count) is substituted for one Slow (two counts) in the Rumba!

In social dancing, when one dances the Rumba Box repeatedly, it doesn't matter where in the rotation (or loop) one begins dancing, so another common Rumba timing pattern is described as **Quick, Quick, Slow** or *Tick, Tick, BOOM*, (so the Box would be described as **Side-Close, Forward, Side-Close, Back** for the Lead and the opposite for the Follow). Either timing pattern dancers choose in social dancing is fine, but notice that the **Forward** or **Back** steps are made on the *Slow* count and **Side-Close** is made on two Quicks. Notice also the similarity with the Foxtrot of the Side-Close occurring on the Quick-Quick counts.

To begin dancing the Rumba, dance the Box over and over again hundreds of times to become very familiar with the timing and where the feet go.

### Combining a 2-Weight Change Component with a 3-Weight Change Component

The Cha Cha rhythm introduces another timing pattern: one **Quick** is divided into two parts with a change of weight taken on each part! Each half of the **Quick-and** (Q/&)amp; takes an equivalent amount of time, which is half of the time required for one **Quick**.

The concept of a half beat is a natural occurrence. Can one clap a second time without moving one's hands apart? Of course not. So, in normal clapping, one *counts* as the hands meet, and the hands are *apart* half-way

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through the time before clapping again. One can therefore count 1-&-2-&-3-&-4-& repeatedly with equivalent time between each word. Clapping occurs on each numeral and hands are apart on each “and.”

To modify that timing to chart the Cha Cha timing, two claps must occur on the third count:

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Clap	-	Clap	-	Clap -	Clap -	Clap	-

Those three claps close together symbolize the Cha Cha Cha! Applying that rhythm to the basic Cha Cha timing results in the following:

**Cha Cha** (tick-tick, tick/a tick repeatedly)

1	2	3	&	4
Quick	Quick	Quick	And	Quick
One Component		One Component		

The basic Cha Cha requires two sets of four counts with five changes of weight in each set. The first component of each set is comprised of two Quicks performed as a **Rock, Recover** and the second component, called a **Chassé**, consists of three weight changes performed during two counts. In the Cha Cha basic the Chassé moves to the side. Therefore, the Lead, beginning with the left foot, dances **Rock Forward, Recover, Side/Close, Side; Rock Back, Recover, Side/Close, Side** (tick-tick, tick/a tick; tick-tick, tick/a tick) and the Follow does the natural opposite (**Rock Back, Recover, Side/Close, Side; Rock Forward, Recover, Side/Close, Side**). What the Lead does in the first set the Follow does in the second, and vice versa.

Notice that the Chassé, counts 3/&4, requires three weight changes (one weight change for each word) so is also called a **Triple**.

### Modifying Patterns to Create Other Rhythms

The Cha Cha basic can be modified by substituting one Slow for each Chassé, (so **Rock, Recover, Side**) resulting in timing QQS (tick, tick, BOOM). Voila! That is the other choice of rhythm for the Rumba! It is possible, then, to dance Rumba to Cha Cha music, and vice versa!

In like manner, the Single Swing pattern, beginning with Quicks, QQSS (tick, tick, BOOM, BOOM), instead of SSQQ as described above, can be modified to substitute a Chassé (Triple) for each Slow, yielding QQ Q/&Q Q/&Q (tick, tick, tick/a tick, tick/a tick), or **Rock Apart, Recover, Side Chassé, Side Chassé** repeatedly, which creates Triple Swing, aka East Coast Swing.

### Let's Dance!

Dancers just starting out should select *one* of the above rhythms and perform the described basic *thousands of times*. When comfortable with the rhythm and basic, move to another rhythm to master that basic, or learn other patterns in the same rhythm by consulting the previous lessons at

<http://home.csulb.edu/~kwest> (Select “Walk In, Dance Out” in the left-hand menu). Happy Dancing!