

Do You Know..... a helpful trick to maintain balance during turns?

By Kaye West

Recently I observed a dancer doing an Underarm Turn (stepping with her left foot and turning right-face) and losing her balance, which not only was awkward but also made the couple late for the next cue.

She said she had a hard time doing Underarm Turns, so I suggested she try ***crossing her foot beyond her standing foot*** to make such a turn. She did so and was elated that it was not only easier, but also she was able to maintain her balance! That is the first of three elements of a trick to make such turns easily.

To understand the difference, one can analyze the body mechanics involved. In stepping straight forward with the left foot and turning on the ball of the foot, the turn feels very rotary, with the body moving around the left leg/hip, so the body weight on the right side of the body tends to pull the person off balance to the right side, and the body momentum seems even to pull a person somewhat backward.

On the other hand, *positioning a foot across and beyond the standing foot* tends to simultaneously *leave the other foot momentarily in place on the floor* (the second element). This procedure changes the track the feet are on so that the majority of body weight is over the left hip after turning and makes the turn *feel* less rotary, which helps the body stop rotation. As weight shifts, or switches, to the left hip (in this example) both feet are on the floor instead of one. These are two of the three elements comprising what some ballroom teachers call a “delayed forward walk turning” and others call a “Switch Turn.” Larry Caves and I believe it is so useful that we used *the component* in our Notes at <https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/latins/cha.html>. It is common in Rumba and Cha Cha figures and also can be used in right and left Underarm Turns in other rhythms.

Understanding why it is called “delayed forward walk turning” reveals the third element. What is delayed is the **hip**. Typically, when the left foot walks forward, the left hip moves forward as the left leg moves forward. In the Switch Turn, the (left) hip is **delayed** so the (right) hip remains forward and the (left) hip is back (It would be just the opposite when making a left-face turn with the right leg). That produces a strong *contra body* feeling, which means that the shoulders and the hips are not on the same vertical plane. The shoulders are more or less “flat” or parallel with the partner’s shoulders while the hips are quite slanted (in this example, they slant to the left). That means that the thighs are pressed close together when the foot is poised to step but hasn’t yet taken weight. (It is typical in dancing that the foot is placed first so the body has a place to go to be above that foot.)

Larry and I have called this preparatory position a “pose” or a “wind-up” for the Switch Turn. In Latins the hips are rotated in the **opposite direction** of the turn (they are toward the left when the turn is right-face). Such a wind-up provides additional momentum to make turns in dancing feel effortless.

Often after the Switch Turn weight returns to the foot that was left on the floor (so there is a “Recover”) making two changes of weight resulting in a Rock step, which could be called a “Switch Rock.” Besides Underarm Turns, the Switch Rock is found in figures such as Chase, Spot Turn, and Alemana. In other figures after the Switch Turn the body continues to move back. That occurs in figures such as the Aida and the Lady’s part in the Cross Body, Hockey Stick, and Fan after a Hip Twist.

What is common in all of the figures is that the turn is made on one count so it is very quick instead of taking two counts to make the turn as is sometimes described.

Try using the three elements of the Switch Turn to see if that trick makes a difference in your turns!