

# How Can I Learn More About Dancing?

By Kaye West

Perhaps at this point you know how to dance and are comfortable dancing in social situations. Great! Possibly you danced years ago and want to get back into it now that you are retired and have more time to devote to it or to reap the joys of moving to music, socializing with friends, or simply enjoying some discontinuous time away from the stresses of normal life or the unfavorable news which seems to bombard us daily.

## ONLINE WRITTEN INSTRUCTION

Maybe you found the website at <https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/dance.html> so you have learned figures in the rhythms described in the Lessons. These Lessons provide several figures in some of the popular rhythms:

- 8 figures in Social Foxtrot
- 4 figures in Single Swing (and you can modify them to dance the same patterns in Triple Swing (aka East Coast Swing or Jive))
- 7 figures in Waltz (some nearly identical to those in Social Foxtrot)
- 3 figures in Rumba (two identical to those in Waltz but with different timing)
- 5 figures in Cha Cha (and you can modify them to dance the same patterns in Rumba)

While one could count 27 figures, many of them overlap except for a slight modification or timing difference, so learning to dance is ***much less complicated***. Nevertheless, congratulations to those who can dance them in all six rhythms!

If you have not learned those figures in the six rhythms (even if you have never danced), then you might like to review the written Lessons to add to your knowledge base! The very best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else. Find a friend, neighbor, or relative; study Lesson #1 until you thoroughly understand it; then teach that information to the student(s) of your choice. When this Lesson is thoroughly practiced in real dance situations (one can enjoy dancing initially knowing just the information in Lesson #1), move on to the next Lesson, and then the next, etc.

If you prefer to learn from hearing information, read the material into a recorder so that you can hear it repeatedly as many times as you want. There are additionally some videos available on the website (and we plan to create more).

Shortly after I had taken beginning round dance lessons, I had the opportunity to assist in teaching the information to others. It was a great blessing to be able to thoroughly rehearse and practice those basics! Knowing the basics inside and out provides the necessary foundation which makes additional learning easier! When the fundamentals are not completely understood, dancers either get in the rut of doing the same few figures or routines *ad nauseum*, even sometimes using the same few patterns regardless of rhythm in social situations (possibly why some decide to stop dancing) or they continue to struggle in their dancing instead of being able to relax and enjoy the continual learning that is available.

## ROUND DANCE LESSONS

Round dancing is the best environment in which to learn to dance. Additionally, it is noncompetitive and done for fun and continuous learning. Plus, it is comparatively inexpensive.

The activity provides sequential learning with a great deal of the essential “floor time” with figures arranged to fit the music. Also, the instruction caters to dancers with virtually any learning modality. Some

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need to *see* what to do, others like to *hear* how to do it, some need to *actually do it*, and there are those who require a combination of two or all three of those modes of learning. Instruction is provided from two different perspectives and folks are encouraged to ask questions to assure understanding. And *everyone* requires hundreds (thousands?) of repetitions of dancing the figures with an interesting variety of order!

In November and January in Mesa, Arizona (the Round Dance Capital of the world) new classes for beginners are offered. The two rhythms which have figures rated at Phase 1 and 2 are the Waltz\* and Two-Step\*. For those who have only minimal dance experience, such classes would be the most helpful. Dancers who have mastered the figures in the Lessons described above or who have comparable dance experience (or capacity to learn quickly) would have sufficient prior experience to be successful in classes featuring other rhythms. The rhythms with figures rated at Phase 3 (so begin at that phase) include Foxtrot\*, Tango\*, Quickstep\*, Cha Cha\*, Rumba\*, Jive/East Coast Swing\*, Bolero, Mambo\*, Single Swing, Merengue, and Slow Two Step. (New classes are listed in the season brochure at <https://rounddancing.azphx.com/>.)

Not around Mesa? Consult the Roundalab site to find an instructor (<https://roundalab.org/find-a-class-table-view/>)!

Years ago, when I was teaching round dancing, my dancers wanted information in writing because they said they could not recall the information sufficiently when they got home and they wanted to be able to review it. Consequently, I wrote the dance manual ***Cold Feet: How to Get Them Dancing*** which was subsequently revised into the edition which is now available **free** to download from my website (<https://www.icbda.com/wp-content/pdf/Books/Cold%20Feet%20II.pdf>) or in the left-hand menu at the **International Choreographed Ballroom Dance Association** (ICBDA) website (<https://www.icbda.com/>). This beginning manual includes the basic figures in the Waltz and Two-Step Rhythms.

When folks join ICBDA (annual dues are only \$15.00 per person), they also have **free** access to download my other books which have figures included in all nine rhythms asterisked (\*) above (these were the rhythms being danced in round dance circles at the time the books were written). Not only do these manuals include thorough indices so folks can readily find information desired, but also they include **footprints** for the basic figures!

Being involved in round dancing provides options: choose a new rhythm to learn, progress to learn more figures at higher-level phases, or even learn new routines at a familiar phase level. During the winter “season” there are many sessions offered weekly for beginners through advanced dancers. Mesa provides more opportunities than any other location!

On my website is a rhythms chart (<https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/rhythms.html>) identifying those danced in the round dance activity. Select the rhythm of your choice which links to a page with more information about that rhythm. One of the pages linked to each rhythm page provides a **checklist** by phase of the figures in that rhythm so dancers can monitor their own learning progress.

## ROUND DANCE VIDEOS

For those who like videos and want to learn from them, Paul Zimmer has uploaded to **YouTube** hundreds of round dance routines written to specific music along with a cue sheet (CS) which describes count by count how to dance each one (<https://cuedballroomdance.com/practice-it/>). In the video the cuer names what to do in the next measure as they are dancing the previously-cued figure (so dancers needn’t memorize the routines). Thus, dancers complete one figure as they listen for what to do next and then dance it as they

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hear the *next downbeat*. So matching the cue sheet with the video can be a useful tool to practice the various routines. The figures in the routines can also be used in social dance situations.

The conventions for how to write (and therefore how to read) a cue sheet and the various abbreviations are included in the *Writing Guidelines* (<https://roundalab.org/wp-content/uploads/Standards/Cue%20Sheet%20Writing.pdf>) and *Abbreviations* (<https://roundalab.org/wp-content/uploads/Standards/Abbreviations.pdf>) documents provided by Roundalab, the organization which standardizes figures on behalf of the round dance movement.

When watching videos, simultaneously visualizing oneself dancing the routines can be extremely helpful in practicing dances... sometimes it is as effective as actually doing them on the dance floor.

## OTHER AREAS OF FOCUS

In first learning to dance, the focus is on the beat (the timing) and where the feet go. Consequently, most of the descriptions of figures involve only descriptions of the feet.

As dancers gain experience and skill, another area of focus is the *character of the dance*. The first characteristic is timing, so folks can practice their ability to recognize the timing pattern by listening for the pattern of *sounds* in music to determine which rhythm of dance would fit the patterns. Is there a more prominent beat every third sound with relatively slow music and the sounds occurring at a steady cadence? Sounds like a Waltz. On the other hand, do the beats say “Tic, Tic, Tic-a, Tic? That is the Quick, Quick, Quick/And, Quick pattern of Cha Cha. How about “Tic, Tic, Boom”? That is the Quick, Quick, Slow pattern of Rumba (and many Two-Step figures). Or Boom, Boom, Tic, Tic? Social Foxtrot and Single Swing use that pattern.

Knowing the typical timing pattern of the rhythms and being able to identify them is very useful in anticipating when to step since dancers step ***simultaneously with hearing the beats of music***.

Other essential characteristics of the various rhythms make the ***body*** want to move in different ways (and the body moves differently at increasing ***levels*** of prowess, so dancing is a constant process of refinement). Learning about the character of the rhythms and how to implement them in dancing can vastly elevate one’s dancing. On our website, we have described the character of Cha Cha (<https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/latins/cha.html>) and what the *body needs to do* to show it. We plan to describe the character of other rhythms in the coming year.

So here is hoping you are enjoying dancing for the many benefits it provides for individuals, for couples, and for communities! Being involved in dancing enriches one’s life and can keep one’s brain and body healthy every year of involvement. Haven’t tried it yet? No partner is needed. There are abundant resources available to help you. Start now! You will be glad you did!