Aida in Rumba and Cha Cha

By Kaye West

As a first-timer at the 50th ROUNDALAB (RAL) Convention in Waco, I found it informative to learn more completely the process to standardize definitions of figures and abbreviations which seems very democratic, with all members invited to provide feedback and changes made only when 75% of those present vote in favor of the proposals. It was also helpful to have round robin sessions so everyone could ask questions and even see figures demonstrated.

In their demonstration of the Aida in Cha Cha, for example, committee members performed the figure correctly. I suspect that the proposed definition was an attempt to indicate that when beginning in a facing position such as Butterfly, dancers must first rotate one-fourth on their weighted foot prior to beginning the figure so that they are in a side-by-side position to perform the figure (The rationale for the change was "correcting body rotation"). However, the words approved for the "improved" definition do NOT match how they danced it.

Those who do not know this figure would find the new definition confusing, and they would not be able to replicate it from the written description.

Decades ago my round dance students told me that written materials available at the time were incomprehensible to them; that they had to know how to do the figure already before the written definitions made sense. They insisted that written definitions need to be clear to those who do not know how to do the figures so that they can read and replicate figures so they could review information to help them remember what they had been taught.

Don't we want our written definitions to communicate clearly to novice dancers? Isn't that a good deal of the purpose of having written definitions? If readers find definitions confusing or unclear, they might henceforth omit referring to the written materials or, worse, give up dancing, believing that they are incapable of learning to dance, when the fault is with the definition, not the ability of readers to understand it.

Clarity on the Aida

In both Cha Cha and Rumba, all steps progress in a path making a straight line.

The first step begins in a side-by-side position, and the foot closer to the partner takes that step regardless of whether facing LOD or RLOD, in Open or Left Open Position.

One-half turn is completed by the end of the second weight change. When dancers make a slow turn, they step Forward/turn ¼, Side/Turn ¼ which is acceptable for beginners. When they turn quickly, they step Forward, Forward/Turn ½ in a manner more in keeping with Latin Characteristics.

Turns are made when full weight is on the ball of the foot, typically mid-way through the count.

A dancer rotates in just one direction during the figure; when beginning with the right foot the dancer rotates right-face and beginning with the left foot the rotation is left-face. The Lead and Follow rotate in opposite directions from each other.

Dancers momentarily face each other during the figure and end in a "V" shape slightly back-to-back ("Aida Line Position").

When beginning in a position facing partner (Butterfly or Open Facing), dancers must swivel on their last weight change in their previous measure to prepare to begin the Aida; that rotation is in the opposite

direction from how they rotate in the figure itself. This turn should be a **Note**, not part of the definition, because one does not have this rotation when beginning in a side-by-side position (or even in an Aida Line).

The Newly-Approved Definition, Using Cha Cha as an Example

Timing: 1,2,3&, 4; FWD TRN, SD TRN, BK TRN/LK, BK;

MAN: Forward right turning left face, side left turning right face turn, back right continuing right face turn/lock left in front of right, back right;

WOMAN: Forward left turning right face, side right turning left face turn, back left continuing left face turn/lock right in front of left, back left;

Note: May be done from Semi-Closed, Butterfly, Open or Open Facing Positions. When done from Butterfly or Open Facing Position the first step is thru between partners. Ends in a "V: Back-to-Back Position. May be done in opposite direction starting with opposite foot.

Man's Footwork Demonstrates Problems with Above Definition

Stepping forward with right foot and turning left-face is a spiral action. Not only is there no spiral action in an Aida, but also it is not clear how much turn there should be. A reader might think it is a quarter turn, in which case dancers would end back-to-back with partner, though readers may interpret it to turn more.

Stepping to the side with his left foot and turning right-face is another spiral action, again erroneously. If he had turned ¼ on the first weight change, this step would be in a regressive direction (not progressing in one straight line).

Regardless of the amount of turn, if dancers turned the same amount on each of the first two weight changes, they would again face their original direction after turning.

If the man rotated one-half or more on the first weight change (and his partner did likewise), they would likely both compete for the same space for their side step.

Turning should be complete prior to the back/lock back. Erroneously adding a turn on the first weight change would end dancers facing each other with distance between them. Without a turn, their path would regress and move in the opposite direction from their first step.

It is pretty obvious that if attempting to follow the directions in the new definition, dancers would be unable to dance the figure and they could become highly frustrated!

In Conclusion

This newly-approved definition is highly confusing and hence can scare off new dancers. Because there are differences in what dancers do when starting facing the same direction and when starting facing each other, the definition should be revised as soon as possible in both Cha Cha and Rumba.

There appears to be confusion in describing when a step occurs in relationship to a turn. Descriptions for dancing are sequential and elements between commas take place on the same count. The term "forward right turning left face" indicates that the step occurs first and the turn is made when a dancers is fully on that foot, which would occur midway through the count. Since in dancing the beginning for a count of a step is

defined as when the foot hits the floor (though how the foot hits the floor and the body position at that point differ in Standard/Smooth rhythms and in Rumba and Cha Cha), a turn prior to the step on count one by definition must occur at the end of the last count in the previous measures.

The only change needed to clarify these definitions from the posted “current definitions” considered at Waco is adding a note: “When beginning in a position facing partner, dancers must swivel on their weighted foot at the end of the previous measure to be in a side-by-side position to begin this figure; that rotation is in the opposite direction from how they rotate in the figure itself.”

An additional note could also clarify the amount of turn on a step for beginners and more accomplished dancers.