

Lesson 13: Getting Clear About Triple Swing

By Kaye West

Compare Triple Swing with Single Swing

Those who have been following the monthly dance lessons have previously learned several patterns in the Single Swing Rhythm which is often one of the first rhythms dancers learn because there are just four changes of weight and the weight changes alternate just like regular walking does (left, right, left, right for **Leads** who are typically males and the opposite for **Follows** who generally are females). Each Quick (Q, counts 1 and 2 on the chart below) takes one count and a Slow (S) takes two counts (count 3 and 4 has one change of weight and counts 5 and 6 has one change of weight). Because there is *one* change of weight over two counts, it is called “Single Swing.” (At <https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/wi-do.html> Lesson #4 has a full review.)

It is very handy to know both Single and Triple Swing because they are interchangeable on the dance floor and even one partner can dance the slower rhythm (Single Swing) while the other dances the more energetic one (Triple Swing). Notice that even though Triple Swing is described as a “six-count” dance, there are **eight** changes of weight because each Slow in Single Swing is substituted for *three changes of weight* in the pattern (a triple, hence the name Triple Swing or East Coast Swing).

While the Rock-Recover can either begin or end various figures (be counts 1 & 2 or 5 & 6), in social dancing it does not matter which is used because just like repeating a two-word phrase over and over (apple tree apple tree apple tree apple....etc.) the parts are in a loop with one following the other. Does “tree” or “apple” come first? Either one! In Triple Swing, patterns often begin with Rock-Recover, so in the comparative chart below the timing is shown beginning that way:

	1	2	3	a	4	5	a	6
Triple Swing	Rock	Recover	Step	Step	Step	Step	Step	Step
Single Swing	Rock	Recover	Step			Step		

While both rhythms take six counts, each word in the chart stands for a change of weight. Therefore, since the **Leads** begin with the left foot, they would step as follows:

In Single Swing: Left, Right, Left, -, Right, - (thus a timing pattern of QQSS).

In Triple Swing: Left, Right, Left/Right, Left, Right/Left, Right (the “/” means one quick count is split in two parts; the first part of that count gets $\frac{3}{4}$ of the count and the second part gets $\frac{1}{4}$ of the count resulting in a timing pattern QQQ/aQ). The triple step has *three changes of weight* during *two quick counts*. This middle step is sometimes described as a “shuffle” step such as one might take when walking with someone and taking a very quick extra step in order to synchronize their steps.

Practice Triple Steps Without the Rock-Recover

Sometimes teachers introduce the triple steps alone at first and have dancers face each other with a Two-Handhold Position (joined hands are typically at *waist or hip height* of the **Follow** in these rhythms). These six changes of weight occur over **just four counts**. In this position, and the timing pattern from above (3/a,4,5/a,6) or that in the chart below, dancers would take the following steps repeatedly until it begins to feel natural:

Counts	1	a	2	3	a	4
Words	Tri-	ple	Step	Tri-	ple	Step
	Quick-	a	Quick	Quick-	a	Quick
Lead’s Steps	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right
Follow’s Steps	Right	Left	Right	Left	Right	Left

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Do the above pattern twenty or thirty times while essentially marching in place. Notice that dancers can say to themselves a variety of things while stepping to get the concepts embedded in their minds: They can repeatedly chant the timing (“1/a,2, 3/a,4” or “3/a, 4, 5/a, 6”); they can say the words (“Quick-a, Quick, Quick-a, Quick” or “Tri-ple step, tri-ple step”). “Triple Step” has three syllables, each indicating a change of weight. Notice that the word “triple” is divided in the chart so that more emphasis is placed on the first syllable and less on the second syllable. They can also name which foot is moving (**Leads** would say “left/right, left, right/left, right” and **Follows** would say the opposite). Trying all such possibilities while actually marching in place provides some variety in practicing the six changes of weight repeatedly. The more repetitions one makes, the more “normal” it feels to do the pattern!

Next, add some movement: On beats one and two dancers would take three steps to one **Side** (beginning with the indicated foot) and on counts three and four take three steps to the *opposite side*. The middle change of weight in each triple has the foot approximately next to the foot that just steps to the side (it can’t go further!). Then the first foot steps again to the side. Some might call this “Side/Close, Side” or “Side/Together, Side” so these are alternate chants one might use. Another chant might be “left/and, left, right/and right” (matching the appropriate feet, of course). Notice that when the left foot starts one moves to the left; when the right foot starts one moves to the right. Use the above chants to practice moving side to side. Notice approximately where the feet are on the floor (dancers should not move very far from their original spot). Do this twenty or thirty times (or more). Again, the more one does it, the more natural it feels!

Once comfortable with that, change *positions* so that the **Lead’s** right hip is next to the **Follow’s** left hip; the **Lead’s** right hand is placed on the **Follow’s** back and the **Follow’s** left hand is placed on the **Lead’s** upper right arm or shoulder. The other hands (**Lead’s** left and **Follow’s** right) remain joined about waist height but they are now joined in front of their bodies. From above, the bodies exhibit a “V” shape so they are slanted somewhat away from the partner; the **Lead’s** left foot is further forward than his right foot; the **Follow’s** right foot is further forward than her left. Some call this position “Closed Position,” which is fine for the Swing rhythm; in other contexts it might be called “Hip to Hip,” “Promenade,” or “Semi-Closed Position.” In this position do one Triple step (three changes of weight) forward then one Triple step back.

Comparing only the triple steps, notice that the feet are placed in approximately the same spots on the floor when moving forward and back as when doing triple steps from side to side! In other words, the **Lead’s** left foot and the **Follow’s** right foot are always further forward than their other foot. On the middle change of weight the opposite foot comes close to the previous foot, but it is still slightly behind it. Also notice that when doing a forward triple the **Lead’s** left foot and the **Follows** right foot are dominant. When they move backwards, the **Lead’s** right foot and the **Follow’s** left foot “lead” (they are further back).

Practice doing triple steps forward and back numerous times, then change positions to Two-Hand Hold without interrupting the cadence. Do additional triples from side to side in this position, then change again to the Hip to Hip position and do more forward and back triples. The **Lead** is in charge of deciding which pattern to do and how many times to do it. The **Follow** has the responsibility of monitoring the **Lead’s** movements and matching her body posture and foot placements to correspond with his. Randomly change how many times each pattern is repeated (or whether it is danced only once before changing) in order to practice deciding when to change and how to respond.

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Add the Rock-Recover

After practicing the two triple patterns many times, first without music and then with music, it is time to practice the triples with the introductory Rock and Recover steps, with each taking one quick count.

Start in Hip to Hip position. On count one both dancers step **back** (**Leads** with the left foot and **Follows** with the right). It is called a Rock step because the other foot remains close to where it was in space, though the other leg might bend (even taking the foot off the floor momentarily). Then on count two, one “Recovers” or “Replaces” weight again on that “free” foot (**Lead’s** right and **Follow’s** left) at about the same spot on the floor as it had been prior to moving on count one. It is best to take a small step back rather than a large one, in order to be ready to regain weight easily. It often appears that this back step is a large one because the other leg bends so the foot is lifted from the floor creating extra space between the feet. It is just an illusion. There are many illusions in dance! Often what we *think we see* is not really what is happening.

In **Hip to Hip position**, then, the **Lead** would step as follows (starting with his left foot) and the **Follow** would move comparably, beginning with her right foot (“L” and “R” indicate which foot takes weight). **Leads** step:

1	2	3/a ,4	5/a,6
Rock Back (L)	Recover (R)	Forward Triple Step (L/R, L)	Back Triple Step (R/L, R)

After practicing this numerous times, intersperse doing pairs of Forward and Back Triple steps (as practiced above) without the Rock and Recover. Then occasionally add the Rock and Recover to surprise the partner.

Next, in **Two-Hand Hold Position** add the Rock and Recover counts. In this position both dancers still Rock **Back**, so they are moving *apart* from the partner. The **Lead** holds his hands steady in space, and because all of the body parts are interconnected, there is a slight pressure at the hands as he steps back. The **Follows** can feel this. It is called a “push connection” but the **Lead** does not actually push the partner. Rather, when the **Follow** senses that added pressure, she responds by providing a comparable pressure and also Rocks back, or apart. Their joined hands remain approximately where they are in space! The **Lead’s** pattern is charted below (the **Follow** does the natural opposite):

1	2	3/a ,4	5/a,6
Rock Apart (L)	Recover (R)	Side Triple Step (L/R, L)	Side Triple Step (R/L, R)

Recap

This document describes four different patterns using Triple Swing, two patterns using **four counts**:

- (In Two Hand-Hold Position) Side triples each way
- (In Hip to Hip Position) Forward Triple and Back Triple

And two patterns using **six counts**:

- (In Two Hand-Hold Position) Rock Apart, Recover, Side triples each way
- (In Hip to Hip Position) Rock Back, Recover, Forward Triple and Back Triple

One can change positions *after the last step of a pattern and before the first step of the next one*. Do a random number of one pattern (only one or several repetitions) to practice the **Lead** and **Follow** roles. Then change the pattern (and possibly the position) to do a second one a random number of times. Then change to a third pattern or the fourth one, mixing them all up in an unpredictable order. Practice to a variety of swing tunes. Exchange roles to develop empathy for what the partner is expected to do.

Most of all, **have fun!**