

Dance Underarm Turns in Swing Rhythms!

By Kaye West

There are two basic Underarm Turns in Triple Swing (aka East Coast Swing or Jive) and Single Swing which have similarities and some tricks to make movements feel natural and harmonious with one's partner. The **Follow** does the turn; the **Lead** signals to invite the partner to turn. In a right-face (RF) turn the **Follow** turns right; in a left-face (LF) turn she turns left (pretty logical, huh?).

In Ballroom the turns are called "Underarm Turns," but this is actually a misnomer because the turn doesn't occur under the *arm*; it is done under the *hand*. In fact, centuries ago French dance masters used the phrase "à la main" (becoming "Alemana") with a literal translation of "at the hand."

Different communities of dancing have specific names for underarm right and left turns which include some differences. In Swing rhythms right-face turns include "Tuck Turn" and "Change Places Right to Left." Left-face turns in Swing rhythms are "Passing Turn" and "Change Places Left to Right." The terms suggest a visual cue to help dancers distinguish the turns. This document addresses the "Tuck Turn" and "Passing Turn" in both Triple Swing and Single Swing and compares them to the basic in each of these rhythms, so eight patterns are described here! Collectively they provide a great deal of variety for a social dance situation.

How Turns Are the Same as the Basic

Basics in both Triple Swing and Single Swing require six counts of music (starting here with the Rock Step). Dancer's feet alternate (just like walking, but with changing direction and cadence). The following chart depicts the similarities and differences. Notice that in the *Triple Swing* counts 3 and 5 are divided in two parts with the first part longer than the second part, so added with the following count there are three changes of weight (a triple) compared with one change of weight in Single Swing. Hence the names of the rhythms!

The count is shown in both numbers and words. A **Quick** takes one count; a **Slow** takes two counts; **Left** (L) and **Right** (R) are abbreviated for consistency. One count of music can be divided into four equal parts, and each part can be named as follows: *Count 1: 1-e-&-a*; *Count 2: 2-e-&-a*; etc. with equivalent quantity of time between each name (in all circumstances the name plus the space following it constitutes the count).

Triple Swing	Count	1	2	3	a	4	5	a	6
		Quick	Quick	Quick	a	Quick	Quick	a	Quick
	Lead's Footwork	L	R	L	R	L	R	L	R
	Follow's Footwork	R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L
Single Swing	Count	1	2	3	4	5	6		
		Quick	Quick	Slow		Slow			
	Lead's Footwork	L	R	L		R			
	Follow's Footwork	R	L	R		L			

The counts and footwork in turns are exactly the same as in the Basic, so anyone can substitute Triple Swing rhythm for Single Swing rhythm, or vice versa, and remain in synch with the music and the partner. Movement for each Basic is described below. **Lead's** side direction is used; the **Follow** does the natural opposite. Otherwise the descriptions apply to both **Lead** and **Follow**. Differences are noted in ***bold italic*** type.

When facing each other:

Triple Swing: Rock Back (***Apart***), Recover, ***Triple*** Step (Side) Left, ***Triple*** Step (Side) Right

Single Swing: Rock Back (***Apart***), Recover, (***One*** Step) Side Left, (***One*** Step) Side Right

When in dancing position "hip to hip" and both facing approximately the same direction:

Triple Swing: Rock Back, Recover, ***Triple*** Step Forward, ***Triple*** Step Back

Single Swing: Rock Back, Recover, (***One*** Step) Forward, (***One*** Step) Back

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Next, dancers must know, relative to the counts (the *timing*), when the *signal* is made and when the *turn* occurs. Generally, the **Lead** gives the signal *prior to the count* when the **Follow** takes weight to turn. When the signal is too early, it is confusing; when it is too late, the **Follow** cannot respond on time. The **Follow** must have weight on her *right* foot before she can turn on that foot. So various elements must be performed in a logical sequence. The precise timing is slightly different in Triple Swing and Single Swing.

Differences in describing figures exist because of beginning and ending positions and the direction of the turn. With various ways to explain figures and techniques, some differences are also included.

Tuck Turn

Dancers *begin* in the hip-to-hip dance position some call Closed Position and others call Promenade or Semi-Closed; they *end* facing each other with **Lead** *still* facing his starting direction and the **Follow** facing in the opposite direction from where she begins.

/ Indicates that a count has been divided in two

* Indicates multiple things happening so further explanation of triple step timing is warranted on count 3&.

** Indicates further explanation of triple step at counts 4 and 4&.

Lead's Movements	Follow's Movements	Triple Swing Timing	Single Swing Differences
Rock back L	Rock back R	1	1
Recover R (body rotates slightly RF)	Recover L	2	2
Triple step L/*R L** rotating body LF still facing starting direction (signal turn)	Triple step R/*L R** curving LF ending facing partner as much as possible	3/*a 4**	3 One step w/ Follow taking weight and moving in front of Lead as much as possible
(*Hand begins moving)		* 3&	3& - Lead begins signal to turn
	(** Move under joined hands taking full weight)	** 4	4 (or 4&) Under joined hands Follow turns RF on ball of R foot to face partner
(**End w/ joined hands in normal position)	(** Turn RF on ball of R foot to face partner)	** 4&	
Triple step R/L R slightly to the right side	Triple step L/R L slightly to the left side	5/a 6	5 - Step Side & hold remaining counts

While some leaders suggest the **Lead** pushes the **Follow** in front of him with his right hand on her back, if he rotates his body slightly right-face on his recover (as a wind-up) and then left-face on his triple, it assists the **Follow** to curve forward; his arm and his hand move as his body rotates and the **Follow** moves with him.

Because the **Follow** must have weight on her *right* foot to turn, she must be set up for the turn on Count 3 in Single Swing (slightly earlier than Triple Swing). Larry Caves suggested a trick the **Lead** can use in this rhythm so the turn is harmonious: Instead of his normal Rock and Recover, he steps *Back* L then *Side* R (so he moves behind his partner as she moves out of the way) making it easier for the **Follow** to end facing him.

To lead this turn (joined hands begin to move at 3& and are in place at 3a for the “high five” signal), the **Lead** first can lower his left hand *slightly* and straighten his fingers so the **Follow** also straightens her fingers as she maintains slight pressure against his palm (it is her responsibility to keep her hand joined to his).

Then he moves the joined hands in a large clockwise circle (moving out and up) as if moving on the outside of a large ball. The **Follow's** fingers swivel against the palm of his hand, and her hand moves

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counterclockwise from her perspective as if on the *inside* of a large ball. His hand stops like a “high-five” sign between them at the right side of her face (from her perspective). She moves the joined hands up sufficiently that she can step underneath them so the joined hands are directly over her head as she steps.

The above procedure allows the hands to continue to swivel against each other so that after the turn they easily return to their normal position, making numerous subsequent figures possible. Some instructors have not yet learned this trick so dancers might see **Leads** lifting the partner’s hand and ending with a very unusual hand-hold with few options available to release the awkwardly-joined hands.

Passing Turn

Dancers *begin* facing each other; both *end* facing each other but in the opposite direction from which they started. Note the many similarities with the Tuck Turn.

Lead’s Movements	Follow’s Movements	Triple Swing Timing	Single Swing Differences
Rock back (apart) L	Rock back (apart) R	1	1
Recover R beginning to turn RF	Recover L beginning to turn LF	2	2
Triple step L/*R L** curving clockwise about ¼ circle (signal turn)	Triple step R/*L R** approximately forward	3/*a4**	3 One step w/ Lead beginning CW path ¼ circle & Follow moving forward w/part weight
(*Hand begins moving)		* 3&	3& - Lead begins signal to turn
(**Have joined hands on partner’s R side by count 3a to help her turn)	(** Take part weight on R foot w/R side of body still back)	** 4	4 (or 4&) Lead swivels ¼ LF on ball of L foot, & under joined hands Follow turns ½ LF on balls of both feet & takes full weight on right foot
(**Swivel ¼ RF on ball of L foot & End w/normal joined hands)	(**Turn LF ½ on balls of feet taking full weight on right foot)	**4&	
Triple step R/L R slightly back (adjust as needed)	Triple step L/R L slightly back	5/a6	5 – Lead steps back on R foot, Follow steps back on L foot & they hold remaining counts

As the turn is made, dancers actually pass each other and change places. The **Follow’s** right shoulder passes the front of **Lead’s** body. Some teach that the **Lead** moves joined hands toward his right shoulder to indicate this turn or that his fingers point the direction she should turn, which is fine initially. If this turn immediately follows the Tuck Turn, awkward hands correct. In isolation, hands can end in an awkward position or **Leads** release contact to change connection while hands are above **Follow’s** head.

Using the procedure described above (leaving joined hands on the right side of the **Follow’s** body) keeps hands normal and shapes her body so her right side is back and her right foot is beyond her left foot in a wind-up position that allows her turn to be made on both feet and arrive with body weight above her right foot in perfect balance. This is a technique known as a Switch Turn or a Delayed Forward Walk Turning. She moves her right arm forward which brings her body weight over her right foot, making the turn effortless.

Knowing there are choices for techniques to use encourages dancers to experiment to see what works for them. Also, it helps them know that if they are open to learning newer or more effective techniques as they are exposed to them, they can refine their dancing as they gain more experience.

Happy dancing with life-long learning to remain young at heart!