

Lesson 5: Learn to Waltz the Night Away!

By Kaye West and Larry Caves

Timing: The First Characteristic of Dance Rhythms

In the thirteen patterns previously introduced for Social Foxtrot and Single Swing the timing has been Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick taking six counts with four changes of weight. The Waltz rhythm also can be thought of as having six counts. Again the Lead begins with the left foot and the Follow begins with her right.

The timing which makes Waltz a different rhythm is that in the six counts there are almost always *six changes of weight* instead of four. Waltz music has a slow or moderate tempo and figures are described by counts (1-2-3) instead of by Quicks which would not convey much information because nearly all beats are Quicks!

Adding Waltz to one's dancing repertoire in social dancing requires that one learn to identify the *downbeat*. In round dancing a routine has been choreographed to specific Waltz music, yet it remains important to recognize the downbeat in order to begin figures in time with the music.

Music has many different rhythm patterns, so clever musicians devised a method to distinguish one rhythm from the others. Their sheet music has horizontal lines (the "staff") showing how high or low a note sounds as well as how much time passes until another note is heard. It also has vertical lines ("bars") which demark one "measure" from the next. In a selection of music on the first staff is a "time signature" which identifies (1) how many notes fill up each measure and (2) the duration of the notes used to count the rhythm.

Social Foxtrot, Single Swing, and Waltz all use quarter notes (designated by the numeral 4). Waltz has *three* beats per measure (3/4 time) and the other two rhythms have four beats (4/4 time). The first beat in each measure is called the *downbeat*, and some music has a dominant sound at the beginning of each measure so it is readily discerned.

More modern music, thanks to creative musicians, doesn't always have a dominant sound, so to distinguish whether there are three or four counts per measure, dancers listen for one dominant sound and begin counting at that point. If they hear another dominant sound after three or four counts, they have identified the rhythm. If not, they keep listening and counting until a regular pattern appears. It does take practice, but everyone can learn to identify the downbeat.

Those who are newer to dancing might wish to practice Waltz timing by counting (**1-2-3; 4-5-6; 1-2-3; 4-5-6;** repeatedly) and marching in place with each count. One can practice listening for the downbeat with any popular music.

Box: The Basic Waltz Pattern

The Box is a basic in several dance rhythms. This chart shows how it is done in the Waltz rhythm:

Role	Starting Position	1	2	3	4	5	6
Lead	Closed Position	Forward L	Side R	Close L	Back R	Side L	Close R
Follow		Back R	Side L	Close R	Forward L	Side R	Close L

The Forward and Back steps make two sides of the Box; Side-Closes make the other two sides (and they move in opposite directions).

Do you notice the **Side-Close** component which is in the Social Foxtrot patterns? Recognizing familiar components in figures can help learn them. The Waltz Box is very similar to the third Social Foxtrot pattern except that each component of *two Slow steps* is replaced by the component of *one Quick step* in Waltz!

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Following just one step, the Side-Close begins with the opposite foot so it moves in two directions (to the right when the right foot steps Side and to the left when the left foot steps Side) where in Social Foxtrot the Side-Close moves in the same direction every time.

Also notice that it takes *two measures* of three counts each to complete the Box. Because there is an *odd number of weight changes* in one measure, the second measure begins with the opposite foot. After six counts (two measures) the same foot can begin a new pattern, just like in all previous patterns which contained an even number of weight changes.

One more important thing to notice: the first measure of the Lead's footwork (counts 1 to 3) is *identical* to the Follow's footwork in the second measure (counts 4 to 6) and vice versa!

Practice the Box, first when counting and taking steps on each count and then with music. "Could I Have This Dance" by Anne Murray and "Moon River" by Andy Williams are helpful selections (available on *YouTube*).

Vary the Box to Create Many New Patterns

Once comfortable dancing the Waltz Box, modest changes add a great deal of variety! All of the following patterns are danced in Closed Position and have just slight changes to the Box pattern. Half of a Box (one measure) can be considered a component. In each description below the Follow does the natural opposite. Practice one new pattern at a time repeatedly, then intersperse it with other Waltz patterns.

Left Turning Box

To modify the Box for it to turn, recognize when, and in which direction, to turn. The turn can be slight or larger. When it turns 90-degrees (one-quarter) and is done in four consecutive measures, the path on the floor is a very large box which in round dancing is called a Turning Box. Starting with the left foot and turning left-face (LF) creates a **Left Turning Box**:

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Closed Position	Forward L (begin LF one-quarter turn)	Side R	Close L	Back R (begin LF one-quarter turn)	Side L	Close R

The turn *begins* after taking weight (on the ball of the foot, about half-way through the count) on the first count of each measure. The **body** turns a bit on the side step and completes the quarter turn on the closing step. The turn is made so that all three steps of the feet make a path of **one straight line** on the floor!

In standard ballroom (smooth) dance rhythms such as Waltz and Foxtrot, a *left* turn is made (1) when stepping *forward* with the *left* foot or (2) when stepping *back* with the *right* foot.

These first two measures constitute a 180-degree change of direction on the floor. Repeat the two measures to complete the Left Turning Box and return to face the starting direction (ballroom would limit this pattern to two measures since they avoid moving against the Line of Dance).

In all the figures below, one-quarter turn begins on the first step and it takes **three** steps for the **body** to complete the turn; the feet in those measures **always** makes a path of **one straight line**.

Progressive Box (aka "Progressive Waltz")

Another modification is to move *forward* in two successive measures. In other words, the Lead would move Forward L, Side R, Close L; Forward R, Side L, Close R.

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Zig Zag Box (aka “Progressive Close Changes Inside Partner”)

What if the Progressive Box has turns in each measure? Why not! The result would be a zig zag pattern and involves a left-face turn in one measure and a right-face (RF) turn in the next:

Forward L (begin LF one-quarter turn), Side R, Close L;

Forward R (begin RF one-quarter turn), Side L, Close R.

To progress down Line of Dance, the forward steps begin on diagonals, so each measure makes a straight line on one diagonal (Lead first moving out between LOD and the Wall) then one straight line on the opposite diagonal (with Lead moving on the diagonal between LOD and the Center of the Hall).

Progressive Twinkle (aka “Progressive Close Changes Outside Partner” or “Serpentine Waltz”)

What if the Lead turns slightly first in order to step outside partner’s foot and then turns to face partner for the side-close? It becomes what is called in round dancing a Progressive Twinkle. Two consecutive Progressive Twinkles move forward in a more compressed zig zag pattern on the floor:

(Turn slightly RF) Forward L (outside partner’s L foot & begin LF one-quarter to face partner), Side R, Close L (turn slightly LF); Forward R (outside partner’s R foot & turn RF one-quarter to face partner), Side L, Close R.

Right Turning Box

What if the Lead danced Half a Box leaving the right foot free (ready to step next) and decided to do a Turning Box? He could begin the four measures of a Left-Turning Box by moving back to begin the Turning Box that way. Instead, he could begin by moving *forward* with his *right foot* and continue turning one-quarter to the right for four consecutive measures.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Closed Position	Forward R (begin RF one-quarter turn)	Side L	Close R	Back L (begin RF one-quarter turn)	Side R	Close L

He would repeat those two measures to complete the Right Turning Box. Note that the turn is toward the right (1) when stepping *forward* with the *right* foot or (2) when stepping *back* with the *left* foot. Another useful principle is that when stepping forward to turn, the weighted foot swivels. When stepping back to turn, no swivel is needed because of how human legs are constructed.

Hesitation Left Turn

This figure combines a Hesitation (a forward step and holding the position) followed by Half a Turning Box Back. Again, the turn may be large or small. Notice the similarity of the Social Foxtrot pattern #9:

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Closed Position	Forward L (Brush)	(Hold)	(Hold)	Back R (begin LF one-quarter turn)	Side L	Close R

“Brush” means to bring the free foot next to the standing foot without taking weight.

The above patterns represent just a sampling of variations which can be created using the Box. Experiment to create even more (for instance, consider other dance positions).

Happy dancing!!