Similar Characteristics in the Flight/Swing Rhythms

By Kaye West and Larry Caves

Waltz, Foxtrot, and Quickstep have many similar characteristics and evolved from some of the same roots. Waltz is the oldest and a great deal of experimentation created the Foxtrot and then Quickstep. They are often described as the "Flight/Swing Rhythms" in the Standard/Smooth categories of dancing.

• **Progressive Partnership Dance –** In these Rhythms dancers move around the hall in a counter-clockwise direction. Steps are long, smooth, and flowing, often giving the look of gliding or skating as dancers progress gracefully around the hall. In a crowded hall in Round Dancing, concentric circles are used, and dancers taking longer steps may pass other couples who move more slowly. (In ballroom venues couples moving more slowly dance closer to the center so dancers with longer strides can use the "outside track.")

• **Walking** – Steps are likened to normal walking, generally with feet using two tracks (though in Banjo and Sidecar Positions, *aka "outside partner,"* every other sequential step in that position has only one track and in Semi-Closed together they have three tracks), and because in Closed Position their bodies are offset to the left, each partner's right foot steps between the partner's legs (and the partner's leg moves when dancing providing more space) so as a partnership they have four tracks. They attempt to have body contact so that they can move as a single unit.

Their knees bend *as (nearly simultaneously) their lower leg extends and their hips rotate slightly as the body moves forward* so their foot is generally in place prior to touching the floor when moving forward. When moving backwards, as their knees bend and the hips rotate slightly so the moving leg can extend straight back from the hip, the toe is prepared for the dancer moving forward to move bodies to "put the partner on his/her foot" (the partner's foot might even slide further). In other words, the dancer moving backwards (including on the "inside" of a turn) must wait for the *partner* to transfer weight very slightly earlier, as the forward-moving dancer determines the size of their step, and harmonious movement is unlikely if the dancer moving back places the foot too early.

Half-way through each step of a figure (at the count of "and" on a Quick and at the *second full count on a Slow*) both of one's knees are equally bent and the "stepping" foot achieves full body weight with the other foot unweighted next to the newly-standing foot. Dancers keep the sole of the feet as close to the floor as they can. After stepping backwards, the heel of the free foot grazes the floor as it approaches the weighted foot.

As a general guideline, Slow steps (and steps with the right foot between partner's feet) are taken with a heel lead (as in normal walking) and Quick steps (as well as steps requiring only a half-count) are taken on the ball of the foot with no time to lower the heel except when the step is prior to a Slow step. See also "Body Awareness – Walking" at https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/articles/walk.pdf on this website.

• **Flight –** Preparing for steps includes pushing off the floor with the ball of the *standing* foot, creating strong progressive movement and giving the appearance of effortless motion. On the first step of a measure legs have "opened" so feet are far apart and when the moving foot arrives on the beat, the heel of the forward foot and the ball of the "trailing" foot are on the floor simultaneously for a split second. That is the stance which is called a "heel lead." On subsequent steps legs are also "opened" though weight is taken on the ball of the foot to create maximum distance and the knees may be slightly bent or straight, depending upon the Rhythm and the particular figure. The last Quick step prior to a Slow count typically ends with the heel also lowering and the knee bending in preparation for the subsequent heel lead.

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• **Swing** – When a figure with three changes of weight *progresses down Line of Dance (LOD)* the *body rotates approximately one-fourth from facing one direction to another.* Dancers "*swing their bodies*" creating the feeling one has when advancing two rungs at a time with opposite hands on horizontal-ladder style "monkey bars."

For example, when stepping forward down LOD with the left foot, the right shoulder is on the outside of the turn, so it begins further back (the upper body faces Diagonal Line and Wall), so the path of the right shoulder lowers and then elevates at the end of the step where it ends further forward (its path has an arc shape, lower in the middle, because of how the knees move) and higher as the body ends facing Diagonal Line and Center, ending with a left-side sway. The sway is a natural feeling during this action because the vertical straight line of the spine extending through the head does not *bend* but slants *as the body slants*. When stepping forward with the right foot the *left* shoulder begins further back.

A similar *opposite shoulder* begins forward when stepping backward so ends further back. The swinging motion always occurs *between* steps (i.e., *after* assuming weight on the first change of weight and *before* the foot reaches the floor for the second change of eight). When dancers end in Banjo Position the swing motion is more evident.

When making successive turns, such as in a Left Turning Box, an arc shape is apparent in the path of the *shoulder* which is on the *outside* of the turn. From the perspective of the dancer moving forward with the left foot, the *right* shoulder begins *back* and lowers as the body travels *forward* and progresses *upward* with a left sway on the Side-Close. In the following measure, the *left* shoulder is on the outside of the turn, so the *left* shoulder has a path in the shape of an arc, so it starts moving down and ends up as weight is taken on the Side-Close with a sway to one's right, etc.

• **Lines** – In all of these rhythms there are figures where dancers momentarily "strike a line" and seemingly hold the position for a moment. The figures are also called "picture figures," though as Bill Goss explains, there is continuous movement of some parts of the body in creating the figures, so they are more like "moving pictures" than photographs. Example figures include Promenade Sway, Oversway, Hinge, Same Foot Lunge, and Contra Check.

• **Heel Turns** – In order to progress around the floor and make turns which travel more or less in a straight line, the partner on the inside of the turn who is backing up takes a second weight change with as little progression as possible so the partner on the "outside" of the turn can comfortably step beyond the partner taking normal-sized steps and without changing from Closed Position.

The path of the feet of the dancer on the inside of the turn resembles an *angle* like the edges of a slice of pie (moving back for the first weight change and forward for the third) with the second change of weight (at the point) made with a "heel turn" (which a **Lead** sometimes modifies slightly to create a "heel pull"). The path of the partner on the "outside" of the turn steps straight forward and cuts across the middle of "the slice of pie" and then moves back to complete a path aligned with the opposite edge of the pie (the path has the shape of a three-way mirror). Dancers remain in Closed Position throughout such a turn. The dancer on the inside of the turn has a second step which represents a path which is part of a very small circle, and the partner on the outside of the turn has a step which moves on a path of a larger concentric circle. When the **Lead** changes dancing position *between assuming weight on the second step and prior to the third weight change*, he determines their ending position (e.g., Closed Position, Banjo, or Semi-Closed *aka Promenade*).

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• **Common Figures** – The vast majority of figures in these Rhythms are the same (See the chart "Similar Figures in Standard/Smooth Rhythms" on this website at https://home.csulb.edu/~kwest/wido/standards/standard-smooth-figures.pdf), but *how* they are danced varies with the particular attributes distinguishing the ***character*** of the various Rhythms from each other.