

# ST. LOUIS SHAG - Updating The Count

By *H. Leon Raper*

Whatta ya mean "updating the <beepin'> count?" First, I gotta explain some technical garbage about the annotation of all forms of dance. Hopefully, it ain't goin' to hurt real bad.

The first and most fundamental concept is that all forms of dance can be represented by Rhythm Units. In 4/4 time you have a 2-Beat Rhythm Unit. In 3/4 Time you have a 3 Beat Rhythm Unit. Several of these Rhythm Units can be linked together to form Step Patterns. Secondly, Rhythm Units have only two forms, Even or Odd. Gee whiz, we are done. Ain't that a real hoot?

Oh, you wanna know what Even & Odd Rhythm Units are? From here on, lets talk only about the 2 Beat Rhythm Units used for 4/4 time - like we use in all forms of swing dancing. Also assure that a Rhythm Unit indicates the number of weight changes (steps) taken within 2-Beats of music. Even Rhythm Units have an even number of weight changes (0,2,...). Odd Rhythm Units have an odd number of weight changes (1,3,...). We will annotate these as (EVEN) or (ODD). Now we are ready to get on to the good stuff.

For many years, the 6-Beat step patterns of East Coast moving and West Coast Swing were represented as (ODD) (ODD) (EVEN). That is, (1&2) (3&4) (5 6). Some instructors are still using that counting technique today. However, the majority of dance instructors have changed over to a different representation which is (EVEN) (ODD) (ODD) or (1 2) (3 & 4) (5 & 6) - same exact dance steps, just different count. Using the new count, the 8-Beat step patterns such as the whip would now be (EVEN) (ODD) (EVEN) (ODD) or (1 2) (3 & 4) (5 6) (7 & 8). Now lets get on to why we need to update the count for St. Louis Shag.

For many years, St. Louis Shag has been taught as (ODD) (EVEN) (ODD) (EVEN) or (1 & 2) (3 4) (5 & 6) (7 8). This doesn't integrate as well with Lindy Hop, West Coast Swing and Balboa as it would if we changed the count. Let's change St. Louis Shag counts (1&2) to (3 & 4), (3 4) to (5 6), (5 & 6) to (7 & 8) and (7 8) to (1 2). The result is the new count which is (1 2) (3 & 4) (5 6) (7 & 8). The dance has not changed - only the count has changed. We now can integrate St. Louis Shag step patterns directly into our Lindy Hop, West Coast Swing and Balboa dancing without having to do any mental gymnastics.

To summarize, we have changed St. Louis Shag Rhythm Units to (EVEN) (ODD) (EVEN) (ODD) and are still doing the same dance. The new count is now (1 2) (3 & 4) (5 6) (7 & 8). Now it fits very nicely with Lindy Hop, West

Coast Swing or Balboa. There is no change to the dance. It is just updating the way we count it - like we did when we updated the method of counting for other swing dances.

I first saw St. Louis Shag at the 1973 World Swing Dance Championships held at the Palladium in Hollywood California - my partner and I also danced in that competition. St. Louis Shag was the most exciting form of swing dance I had ever seen. Mike Faille and his partner Cooke Giamo burned up the floor doing St. Louis Shag. Later, Kenny Wetzel also showed his mastery of the dance. I knew that Kenny executed a great Flying Lindy, but had no idea he was also a master of St. Louis Shag. Once I saw what he could do, I talked him into giving my partner and me lessons in St. Louis Shag. It was great and we started using it in our competition dancing. You want a feel-good pill? Take St. Louis Shag and don't call anyone in the morning - sleep in.

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