

TURN TECHNIQUE

As do all good dance instructors, I tell my students to press up into their turns, stand erect, keep eyes level, and pick some point to spot. But there is one element that seems to be a consistent problem with many new students.

Even though they press up, they keep their weight foot glued to the floor and don't allow it to pivot in the direction of the turn. A good example is in two step where the lady is standing on her left foot ready to execute one full turn clockwise (right) on a quick quick. She will start turning to her right, keeping her left foot glued to the floor until her left knee hurts, and only then will she unglue her left foot from the floor as she does a weight change to her right foot. The result being she did not complete a full half turn. She will continue turning right, keeping her right foot glued to the floor until her right knee hurts, and only then will she unglue her right foot from the floor as she does a weight change to her left foot.

The common comment is: "well I guess I just didn't turn fast enough." That is not the problem at all! The problem is that she did not allow her weighted foot to pivot in the direction of the turn. She kept it glued to the floor. A two step example was given to make it easier to visualize. The problem really gets critical in West Coast swing where turns are executed in triple rhythm.

To correct the problem, the student must be taught to do a press-pivot. That is, to press up on the weighted foot and pivot at the same time in the direction of the turn. The problem is not as simple to solve as it sounds because most students think that is what they are doing, but they are not. A teacher may get a student to do the press-pivot properly only to find out a little later that the student has reverted to gluing their weighted foot to the floor. Correcting this problem will take a lot of patience on the part of the instructor and may require quite a bit of practice by the student until the process becomes automatic. The problem as defined here applies equally to men.

by H. Leon Raper

NOTE Using the shoulders to indicate the turn will help as well as keeping the thighs fairly close together. Getting dancers to pivot on the ball of the foot instead of "walking around is "easy to say" but not always easy to get across to the student.

Start the turn with the shoulders, then pivot on the ball of the foot.

Editor KG