

WEST COAST SWING DANCE TECHNIQUE

by Leon Raper
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WEST COAST SWING

West Coast Swing is probably the ultimate example in social dance in control and movement of two human bodies make them function as one.

BASICS - WHAT ARE BASICS?

The human mind has the ability, with proper training, to learn things which can eventually be performed automatically without conscious thinking, when required to do so. When trying to learn advance material the human mind will be comparing the new material against the basics it has learned. If there is no conflict between the new material and the basics then the new material will be learned without much difficulty. If there is a conflict then there will be a big dog fight between the conscious mind (new material) and the basics, which have become automatic. If there is a conflict then the result will probably be that the dancer(s) may not be able to perform the new material without first going back and going through the laborious process of relearning correct basics. Many dancers will not survive this relearning process and remain forever handicapped in their attempts to perform advanced material properly.

WHOSE BASIC TEACHING TECHNIQUE IS CORRECT?

Many dance instructors teach a stylized form of basics which may be perfectly adequate if the dancers never intend to dance at high speeds. However, these stylized basics may become completely inadequate when trying to perform very high speed forms of this dance, resulting in even advance dancers looking like they are out of control and doing their best to survive. The form of basics I teach are completely non-stylized and will yield the ultimate in control at extremely high speeds - including graduating to the highest speed form of the danced called the Flying Lindy. With the non-stylized form, the dancers are not going to look very flashy in the beginning. However, if the dancers develop these non-stylized basics, they will quickly be able to also incorporate many of the stylized moves into their dancing. To become accomplished in either method requires a very committed effort and practice. I give credit to Kenny Wetzel - one of the most knowledgeable instructors in the world in high speed forms of dancing - and to Skippy Blair for her invention of the Universal Units System.

SLOT

West Coast Swing is danced in a slot. A slot can be thought of as a "straight narrow path with a Rail painted on each side of the Path." This Path is the Women's Line Of Dance (LOD). When the man leads a step pattern in which the woman is to pass the man, the women's LOD is straight through the man. To accomplish this, the man will step onto a Rail on the side of the Path allowing the woman to stay on the Path as she passes him, after which the man will return to the center of the Path. Slot control will come with practice if the basics are adhered to. Please do not mistakenly think that a slotted dance has to be danced in the same direction all the time. The slot may change directions as desired, but control of the slot must be developed to become a good dancer.

FEET - Don't watch, no matter how much you think it will help. You must learn to convert instructions directly to movement.

EYES - Level, not down or up.

BODY - Erect, but relaxed, feet together, knees slightly flexed, and buttocks slightly tucked under. (Some prefer the hips slightly back. Editor)

LEAD AND FOLLOW THROUGH

A proper lead and follow through is the means the man uses to communicate his intentions to the woman. The man must follow through with his lead hand to the completion of the step pattern. This is one item that separates good dancers from poor dancers. PLEASE NOTE. There is a fine line between adequate lead and follow through and being over forceful! The key is to guide, but not force, allowing the woman to feel free to do her own creative moves.

FOLLOW

The woman must not anticipate. She must concentrate on the man's lead. PLEASE NOTE. She must execute all steps using her own power of movement and must not pull or push on the man's lead hand(s). This is, with the exception of leads that require intentional compression or tension.

RESISTANCE/ARM TENSION

Proper Arm Tension is absolutely mandatory to properly execute dance step patterns. When the man moves the woman's hand it

is because he wants her body to respond with movement in some direction. It is not just that he wants to shake hands.

FRAME

Good dancing cannot be accomplished without using good frame.

TURNS - MAN'S LEAD

The proper lead for a turn is for the man to lift his hand directly over the women's head and only move his hand in the direction of the slot. He must not crank the woman in her turn. Cranking the woman in her turn throws her off balance and prevents her from doing her own creative interpretations of a turn. The man's hand should provide a very stable point of reference for the woman.

TURNS - WOMAN'S FOLLOW

The woman must press up slightly on the ball foot on which she is currently standing and allow the foot to pivot in the direction of the turn prior to changing weight to her other foot. Her feet must be very close together in the turn. Her eyes must be level (not looking up or down). PLEASE NOTE. Damage to the dancers legs can occur if turns are not executed properly. Also, the woman must execute turns under her own power without any help from the man, and she must not pull or push on the man's lead hand.

Although the author was speaking of the West Coast Swing techniques, the East Coast Swing techniques use much of the same process. East Coast Swing is also danced in a slot most of the time, however, the circular movement is used when necessary. The lead and follow process is the same in both dances. Editor.

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