Ballroom Dancing Simplified

Introduction.

To the beginner what should be a joy could become what often seems like a combination of mysterious terminology and unnatural movements.

The following, it is hoped will remove any trepidation and allow you to move with harmony to many a joyous melody. We will endeavor to explain in simple terms many words and actions one will encounter.

DANCE A DEFINITION.

"To move in harmony and in sympathetic rhythm to a melody".

BEST FOOT FORWARD.

It is best for both people to move off on the same foot. The man in most cases takes a step forward with the left foot. The first problem some people have is to determine which is the left foot. Yes, some people do not know left from right. At classes the teacher will often say something like "take a step forward with your left foot". Some folks will be observed looking downward to the floor to see if actually the brain gives the correct instruction to the desired foot. Many will take two steps forward, one with the incorrect foot and another with the correct one to correct the incorrect one. So what has happened is that although the teacher has instructed the class to move forward one step with the left foot, most will have moved forward two steps beginning with the right foot and as they are looking down to observe this simple action they will bump into the person in front who perhaps got it right and did not move as much as the person behind. This results in this person being shoved forward 3 to 4 steps.

The teacher takes another valium and believes they should have taken up bricklaying.

So let us examine left foot & right feet.

STAGE 1 FEET MEDAL.

The left foot is the one with the big toe on the right side of the foot. The right foot is the one with the big toe on the left side of the foot. So beginners should start by dancing without shoes and socks.

The above is always the same except in lock steps when for instance the right foot is passed behind the left foot. A downward glance will reveal that the left foot (with big toe on the right) is now more to the right side of the body. And the right foot (with big toe on the left) is more to the left side of the body. This can be very confusing especially when teacher says move your left foot forward from the locked position. You look down and see a foot that appears to be your left foot on the left side of your body but is in fact your right foot in the locked behind position. You then give this foot the instruction to move forward, this results in a very ungainly hop or you topple over.

So you can see that it is very important to be able to instantly recognize your own feet. You must practice at home without foot covers to move your feet at will. This should not be practiced in front of a mirror. The reason for this is that the image is reversed. Your left foot will be your right foot even though you think the opposite.

Once you have mastered the art of moving the right foot, that is the correct foot without looking down you can progress forward with head held high and observe the people in front and take direction. This is covered in stage 2.

You are now awarded a stage 1 medal and are allowed to dance Around the floor in shoes. Ladies are at an advantage especially if wearing "Latin" shoes as the toes are not covered. Hint, men can sometimes get their bearings for correct feet bye looking at ladies feet (especially in Latin) and reversing foot position.
Note: the man in most cases determines which foot to move first. The lady will of course move the opposite foot in the opposite direction. So lady’s will perhaps like to read again the above text substituting in many cases the left foot for the right foot and be moving that foot in the opposite direction to the man. In almost every case and in every dance the man starts by moving forward with his left foot forward (right foot back for the lady) ..........simple.

You can move on to the next stage.

**DIRECTION:**
First stage, which way around the floor?

All dancing is done around the ballroom in an anticlockwise direction. The first problem here is that many (especially the young) have not grown up in a clockwise world. We now live in a digital world. How can we therefore explain this movement. Simple......

First stand up straight with feet together and arms at sides. Then raise right arm (one on same side of body as right foot see above) from hip moving upwards towards head. Your hand is now moving in an anticlockwise direction. This is of course in a vertical plane. To make this easier to follow go to the center of the ballroom and lie face down on the floor. Remember that is face down on the floor not on your back as this will reverse the direction. Now repeat the process from hands at sides raising right arm towards the head, this is the direction one dances around the floor.

Whilst doing this exercise be careful not to lie down in the way of other beginners practicing moving forward without looking at feet from previous stage.

All ballroom floors are the same no matter how large or small they are. On visiting a new ballroom if confused simply go to the center of the floor lay face down and repeat the exercise to gain direction. Hint, sometimes older male dancers can be seen holding their left hand and ladies right hand unnaturally high. This is in fact a result of them cheating and looking at their watch face on left wrist to gain direction. (does not work with digital watch)

**Direction** : next stage line of dance.

There are (given) 360 degrees in a circle. Fortunately we only use 8 positions on the dance floor. They are as follows....

- **L.O.D** line of dance. this is moving parallel to wall and in forward direction. (relationship taken from man)
- **A.L.O.D** against line of dance. Is man moving in reverse to above

The next six positions are relative to the center of the ballroom. To ascertain the center of the ballroom can be difficult. One could visit a local civil engineering company and loan some survey equipment, building plans for the ballroom, dividers, calculators, tape measures and large quantities of chalk. But there is a simple method.

If one closely observes the area one will often see people laying face down on the floor. They are in fact at an earlier stage of this text. They also will be in the center of the floor. Now what you do is this. Ask them to spread their arms and legs to form an ‘x’. Some you might find are busy waving there right arms up and down if so wait until they are finished.

When you have got them in this position ‘x’ rotate them so that their head is pointing north. In this position there unmentionables will point south. If compass direction not known find someone who was a scout or girl guide.
Once this position is attained if you slide them (still in position) east this will be towards the wall and remember this action.
Next slide them back towards the center (west) and remember this action.
Now observe their position for the next simple direction on our dance compass.
Again make sure that they are in the ‘x’ position. You will find that their right hand is pointing diagonal forward to wall. 1/2 way between north & east.
Their left hand is pointing diagonal to center forward.
Their left leg is pointing diagonal to center against L.O.D
Their right leg is facing diagonal to wall against L.O.D
See simple diagram below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NORTH = L.O.D</th>
<th>North West</th>
<th>North East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>left hand = diag to center</td>
<td>right hand = diag to wall</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

WEST
Dance to center
EAST
Dance to wall

Then reverse these positions for opposing compass positions until you reach South or Against Line Of Dance.

If you like you can use some chalk to mark these positions on the floor. You can then allow the person laying down to get up. Or if they have fallen asleep slide them to the side of the floor, west is best.

Foot position movements also follow the same simple steps and are as follows.

Move left foot forward in line of dance is simply move left foot (with big toe on right) north in anti-clockwise direction or in direction head of person laying on floor is pointing move left foot forward diag to center is simply Move left foot (with big toe on right) north west in anti-clockwise direction or in direction left hand of person laying on floor is pointing and so on........

Having mastered this stage 2 you are now awarded stage 2 medal.

**STAGE 3 MEDAL TIMING.**

Perhaps the most important part of dancing.

You may have heard expressions such as 3/4 time & 4/4 time.
Also such things as 50 bars per minute or that a dance is a 32 or 16 bar sequence.

Sound confusing let us see if we can break this down.....

I think we all agree that there are 60 seconds in on minute.

If we take the waltz the tempo or beats are 31 beats per minute so each beat is aprox 2 seconds. Each bar of music in waltz is 4 beats long. The timing is 3/4 time, this means that we only take steps on 3 of the 4 beats.
All steps are of equal length or time. That is each step is aprox 2 seconds in length. There are no real slows and quick’s in waltz. The forth beat is really a slight pause or hesitation.

Step 1 buy a metronome.

Set metronome to strike at aprox 30 beats per minute. Hold it in left hand as steady as possible. Hold pendulum, prepare to move forward on left foot ( any direction or if many doing exercise in L.O.D.). Take first step forward slowly and as it hits the floor release pendulum this is beat one. Move right foot forward so that is hits the floor on beat two. Move left foot forward again so that it hits the floor on beat three.
Now this is the hard bit. You must not do anything on the fourth bit, try whistling or read a paper or something you must ignore this beat at all costs. But not all of it because you must be ready to move the left foot forward again on beat five. This is in fact beat one again and so on.

What is happening is that you only move 75% of the time, 25% is taken up in the pause. We are not dancing waltz steps here only walking forward getting the feel of the timing.

The math’s for this is as follows:

\[
60 \div 2 = 30 \div 75\% = \text{moving} = 22.5 \text{ steps} \\
30 \div 25\% = \text{pause} = 7.5 \text{ steps}
\]

Now we can see that 3/4 time is really the following.

\[\frac{3}{75} \quad \text{or} \quad -- \frac{4}{100}\]

Now some modern sequence or more commonly new vogue dances are split into 32 or 16 bar sequences what does this mean.

Those fortunate to have listened to the god of the ballroom Mr. Neville Boyde teaching will have heard him calling the timing.

As above you will agree that as we walk we count one two three ignore the four and count one two three again.

The above is in fact two sequences. If we raise the one count each time by one figure we begin to sound like Mr. Boyde.

\[1 \ 2 \ 3... \ 2 \ 2 \ 3... \ 3 \ 2 \ 3... \ 4 \ 2 \ 3... \ 5 \ 2 \ 3... \ 6 \ 2 \ 3... \ \text{and so on}\]

To 32 2 3. This means that as in the twilight waltz we have gone through a 32 bar sequence dance.... Or

\[32 \times 4 = 128 \text{ beats divided by} \ 75\% = 96 \text{ steps with} \ 32 \text{ pauses}\]

Do all of these calculations hold calculator in right hand because metronome is in left hand.

Sometimes in waltz we take two steps to one beat as in chassis steps these are really quick’s but no one will admit it. And sometimes the count goes 1 2 3 4 5 6 just to confuse matters more.

The waltz is the most simple.

The quickstep is approx 50 bars per minute with slow steps taking two beats and quick steps taking one beat. The timing here is 4/4 time. The sequence is basically slow slow quick quick slow slow quick quick slow...and so on

On examination the slows = 4 beats the quick’s = 2 beats in sequence this means that in real time the slows occupy more time. So the quick step is really more little bit slow step.

The slow foxtrot is 4/4 time at aprox 30 beats per minute or same as waltz but we dance on each step. It like the quick step has two slows and two quick’s time same as quickstep but sequence is slow quick quick slow quick slow so a slow most of the time sits in between two quick’s.

The main problem here is that people when walking to time might say quick or slow but still move in quick or slows.

It is best to say "quick" quickly, and "slow" s l o w l e y

This will help. Many folk will be observed dancing in all quick’s especially in foxtrot.

Tango = 2/4 @ 33 bars 
Viennese = 3/4 @ 60 bars 
Rumba = 4/4 @ 32 bars 
Cha Cha = 4/4 @ 34 bars 
Paso Doble = 2/4 or 3/4 or 6/8 @ 62 bars (58-66 is permissible) with a step to each beat in 2/4 or 3/4 or one step to each of three beats in 6/8 time. Don’t do this dance.......
**Ballroom Etiquette**

Dance in anti-clockwise direction.  
Always give way to people in front do not ride bicycle on dance floor  
Do not stop to chat to others in middle of floor  
If one bumps into other couple always apologize  
Always escort lady to seat  
Always remove fallen partners from floor prior to selecting another partner  

Hint.  

I am often asked how the lady signals to the man when she sights another couple approaching and there is possibility of collision. This will happen when man doing backward figure so being un sighted. Quite simply it is this she gently squeezes his left hand with her right hand. 

If hazard coming from center squeeze with thumb.  
If hazard coming from wall squeeze with first finger  
If hazard coming from diag to wall squeeze with 2nd finger  
If hazard coming from diag to center squeeze with 3rd finger  
If hazard coming from diag to A.L.O.D squeeze with 4th finger if hazard coming from L.O.D squeeze with pinky  
If hazard coming from A.L.O.D diag cent use 2nd & 3rd finger  
If hazard coming from A.L.O.D diag wall use 1st & 3rd finger  

Simple.......  

I look forward to bringing you more ballroom dancing tips in the near future.  
Enjoy.  
Terry.  

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