

Glossary of dance moves & counter-moves



Aerial Invented by Frankie Manning as part of the Lindy Hop, an aerial is an “air step”, i.e. a move where one partner supports (“lifts”) the other partner off the ground — typically the leader supports the follower.

Anchor step Used in West Coast Swing to indicate that a dancer does not come towards their partner — often an in-place triple step. This action has a syncopated feeling and counted &1, or &2, i.e., the “ball” step splits off the end of a beat. It is used, e.g., in the kick ball change. This move is achieved by kicking your (left or right) foot then stepping behind the other and stepping again with the other quite simple.

Anticlockwise turn where one partner rotates anticlockwise under a maintained (joint) handhold with the other partner. Also known as turning left, since the left shoulder goes backwards.

Balance is a folk dance where a dancer hops on a foot, lands on that foot and then kicks the other foot (without placing weight on it).

Basic figure One of several step patterns that characterize a dance and constitute its basis. Sometimes there is no strict agreement as to their number. Usually they are the ones taught at the beginner level.

Basic movement is the very basic step that defines the character of a dance. For some dances it is sufficient to know the basic step performed in different handholds and dance positions to enjoy it socially.

Bicycle kick is footwork similar to pedaling a bicycle (backwards) — bring the foot slightly forwards, raising it to knee height and then bringing it backwards, into a “lunge backwards”. The bicycle kick can be performed without lunging backwards — in this case both feet can leave the floor.

Body ripple A body-wide “Mexican wave” either up or down — a body pop from break-dancing. Body ripple upwards: hips (backside) do a circle — backwards, down, forwards and then up; by bending the knees, then “unbending” them (with a slight pelvic thrust) — shoulders follow a similar circular path, slightly after the hip motion. Body ripple downwards: chest out, stomach out, hips out and up, sink into legs slightly.

Bota fogo is a dance step similar to a Cucaracha, but with traveling steps. Starts with feet apart: Cross foot over. Step out to the side on ball of foot, swiveling approximately 90°. Replace weight onto other foot.

Box Step is a dance figure named so because the steps rest in the four corners of a square. It is used, e.g., in American Style ballroom dances: Rumba, Waltz, bronze-level Foxtrot. The leader begins with the left foot and proceeds as follows.

First half-box: Forward-side-together

Second half-box: Backwards-side-together

Every step is with full weight transfer. During the second and fourth step it is advised the foot to travel along two sides of the box, rather than along its diagonal.

Breakaway is a series of dance steps performed by partners separately on the dance floor, without an explicit dance hold.

Bump A dance craze from the 1970s in which dancers lightly bump hips on the main beats of music. Bumping could also occur from hip to backside, etc.

Cha-cha-cha A chassé left, right, left, or right, left, right in two musical beats, with “equal” timing — 1 and 2.

Chaines / Chainé turns / Chaines turns French for 'chain', this step is a turn with the body held in a static 1st, taking half a turn from one foot to the other. Many put together in a sequence form a chain of small turns.

Chassé (Shah-say) French: chassé (hunted). A chassé is a series of steps where the feet “chase” each other.

Circle A left (right) circle is a folk dance move where dancers hold hands and move round in a circle clockwise (anticlockwise).

Closed Change is a basic step in the Waltz, performed in closed position. The man steps forward on either foot whilst the lady steps backward on the opposing foot (eg: the man steps forward on his right foot whilst the lady steps back on her left). They will then step to the side on the other foot, and conclude the figure by closing the first foot beside the second. Each step takes up a full beat of the music.

Coaster step Used in West Coast Swing.

Columbia A traveling Modern Jive move where both partners move sideways using footwork similar to a grapevine, or “fall off the log” (without kicks).

Cross-body lead is a common and useful move in Latin dances such as Salsa, Mambo, Rumba and Cha-cha-cha. Basically, the man on counts 2 and 3 of his basic step (assuming dancing on 1) does a quarter-left turn (90° counterclockwise) while still holding on to the woman. On counts 4 and 5, he leads the woman forward across him, i.e., firmly leads her with his right hand on her back, so that she travels across and turns around and faces the opposite direction she was facing. At the same time, the man does another quarter-left turn as necessary in order to follow the woman and face her. At the end

of the move, the couple has reversed their original positions. The Cross-body lead can be done with single-hand or double hand hold, with or without a woman's underarm turn, or leading the woman to do a free spin.

Cross-dressing The act of wearing clothing generally associated with the opposite gender. A form of "masquerading", cross-dressing often appears in forms of collective ritual, such as carnival, to connote forms of transgression.

Cucaracha Spanish: cucaracha (cockroach). A cucaracha is a step where feet are initially close together, then one foot steps out (to squash the mythical cockroach), before closing back to its original position. For example, a left cucaracha: step out with weight on left ball of foot to the left side, so feet are apart (1), replace weight onto the right foot (and), close left foot to the right foot with weight (2).

Dance With A Stranger A Jack'n'Jill dance competition.

Dip And Dive A folk dance move where a couple ducks under another couple's raised handhold, or raises their handhold for the other couple to duck underneath.

Dos-a-dos, Dosado is a circular movement where two people, who are initially facing each other, walk around each other without or almost without turning, i.e, facing in the same direction (same wall) all the time.

Dream Dance Cult of the Menomini Indians of Wisconsin USA (c.

1879) in which ecstatic dance is enacted around a large central drum embodying the Great Spirit.

Dyonisian Worship Developed in Greece around 3000 BC, it evolved into a "mystery religion" involving methods of intoxication, mostly attached to forms of dance and music, which enabled individuals to return to more "natural states" of being. Dyonisian Worship were often associated with forms of orgy.

Enchufla is a dance movement common in salsa, where two dance partners facing each other change positions. The dance partners keep contact with one or two hands while rotating concentrically over 180 degrees around the same point in opposite directions.

Feather Step is a basic figure in International Style Foxtrot, in which the man makes three or four steps basically forward, with the third one (right foot) done outside the lady.

Feast of Fools Medieval Christian holiday involving lower-clergy who would dress absurdly, often in women's clothes or with their own clothes inside out, and perform an absurd version of Mass, replacing the Latin sermons with gibberish and dancing wildly through the church. Generally banned by the Church in the 1400s.

First Corners In folk dance, when men are in a row facing the ladies in a separate row, the first corners are the first man and the last lady, i.e. a diagonally facing couple.

Follower's line (Lady's line) The follower's line is the notional line

along which the follower can move straight forwards, or backwards (this is effectively a line perpendicular to the follower's shoulders or hips) — this is a similar concept to a slot, except that the follower's line moves as the follower rotates, whereas a slot remains fixed.

Free spin A general term to describe a spin without any handhold.

Frog A low two-footed jump into a squatting position with both feet apart. Hands are often held out at waist height away from the body, e.g. in preparation for a hand-to-hand Charleston.

Gancho "Gancho" means "hook" in Spanish and describes certain "hooking actions" in some dances of Latin American heritage, in Argentine Tango (leg action) and Salsa (arm action and foot action) in particular.

Gear-stick Handhold or arm position: both partners have forearms held vertically against each other (hands up), so that each partner's arm is in an L-shape, with upper-arms roughly horizontal. Also used as the name for a move that features that hand position prominently.

Ghost Dance Arose in the 1860s among North American Indians (Sioux, Cheyenne, Shoshone) involving groups of dancers circling together leading to trance states.

Grapevine A series of alternate steps to the side, where the leg on the opposite side to the direction of movement alternatively crosses in front of the other foot, and then behind the other foot. The grapevine is similar to a "fall off the log" (without kicks). Might

fancifully be compared to a sailor trying to keep his footing on deck.

Guitar A guitar is a dance position in Modern Jive that is a "man sway", i.e. a sway position where the leader and follower have exchanged positions.

Handcuff is a handhold where both of the follower's hands are held in one of the leader's hands.

Hustle A common form of individual and group dance popular within discos of the 1970s. The couple dance form of hustle is usually called New York Hustle or Latin Hustle. It has some resemblance to, and steps in common with, swing and salsa dancing. As in the Latin dances, couples tend to move within a "spot" on the dance floor, as opposed to following a line of dance as in foxtrot, or as opposed to tracking within a slot as in West Coast Swing or LA Hustle.

Inside partner step A step taken forward into the space occupied by the partner, while the partner steps backwards. During this step feet tracks of both partners overlap.

Inside turn The term is applied to an individual turn of a partner in the couple. Basically, it denotes the turn directed "inside" of the couple. The meaning is intuitively clear, but it may be performed in numerous ways and in different handholds, so that even accomplished dancers are confused. Most often it is understood that an inside turn is an underarm turn under the right arm if turning left and under the left arm if turning right.

Kick is a foot and lower leg action that imitates a kick, e.g., of the ball. Its style may vary from light flick to a kick in martial arts.

Lock Step is an alternative variation of a chasse action which occurs when the moving foot swings to a stop across the track of the standing foot rather than closing next to it. In the Latin dances the combination of the crossed position and the turnout of the feet means that the rear toe will be pointed at the heel of the other foot, while in the Standard dances the lack of turnout means the feet will be parallel. In Standard the basic locking action is usually preceded and followed by a left side lead. The Latin lock step is often featured when Cha-cha is danced in Open position with a one-hand hold.

Lunge In a lunge the feet are more than a shoulder width apart stood on the ground. The foot in the direction the knee is bent over the foot in the direction of the lunge and most weight is vertically over that foot. Other leg is straight — possibly pointed out “in-line”. Looks similar to a “fencing” move.

Lutheranism is a branch of western Christianity identified with the teachings of Martin Luther; launched the Protestant Reformation and a general challenge to Roman traditions of theology. Lutheranism led to various bans on dance rituals, identifying dance rituals as unbecoming of Christian behavior; such attitudes reflect a general trend within early Protestant doctrine, which sought to eliminate forms of theatrical and decadent display in favor of more humble presentation and congregation.

Military Parading Developed throughout Europe in the 1600s, in

relation to a general "ordering" of the army influenced by the Protestant Reformation, and extending earlier Ottoman military traditions; "parading" became a form of military display uniting group dynamic with music and costume, and introduces new ordering to the presentation and disciplining of the body.

Milonga An Argentinian dance, and also a (formal) Argentine tango dance event — that may also confusingly include milonga dances.

Moonwalk was popularised by american singer Michael Jackson in the early 80s; he did it the first time at the Motown 25 show on his song "Billie Jean". Nowadays this famous step is often used in Hip Hop Dance with other slide and glide moves.

Natural turn and some other figures are those in which the dance couple rotates to the right (clockwise).

Outside partner step is taken with the partner beside the moving foot (e.g., to the left of the left moving foot). During this step feet tracks of both partners do not overlap.

Outside turn The term is applied to an individual turn of a partner in the couple. Basically, it denotes the turn directed "outside" of the couple. The meaning is intuitively clear, but it may be performed in numerous ways and in different handholds, so that even accomplished dancers are confused. Most often it is understood that an outside turn is an underarm turn under the left arm if turning left and under the right arm if turning right.

Parody of the Gods Aspect within Carnival traditions in which individuals are given the freedom to parody the upper classes. Often involving costuming and parading, along with intoxication and dance, the tradition led to numerous reforms within the Church, recognizing the political threat embedded in such acts.

Passion Plays A play depicting the passion of Christ - his suffering, crucifixion and ultimate resurrection, often involving music and hymn. Such depictions of Christ have been seen as spectacles honoring Christ's doctrine of "love" and may create an atmosphere of ecstatic presentation.

Pentecostalism is a religious movement within Christianity that emphasizes direct and personal contact with God, often involving ecstatic rituals with dance and music leading to the "gift of tongues".

Progressive dance In a progressive dance partners change (progress) during the dance, e.g. leaders move on at set times to the follower on their right. Typically performed in a circle. Old-time ballroom sequence dances are often danced progressively, e.g. The Gay Gordon's.

Promenade is a folk dance move where couples dance around in a side by side position (e.g. a basket, or a sway position).

Puritanism Developed in the 1500s in England in response to Church reform; the Puritans believed further reform was needed and they adopted a more strict form of Calvinism based on self-discipline, which banished all forms of ecstatic display.

Rave A term used to designate all-night dance parties (often associated with the drug "ecstasy"), originating in the 1980s. Often associated with DJ performers and related Techno, Electronica, and Trance music, the term quickly became associated with the subcultural movement around acid house music (though earlier usages of the term appear in the 50s and 60s, also designating "wild bohemian parties"). Raves in the UK often occurred in large outdoor areas, which led to government crack-downs in the early 1990s, and related laws banning large gatherings.

Reverse turn and some other figures are those in which the dance couple rotates to the left (counterclockwise).

Ritual of Inversion is a ritual where members of subordinate groups temporarily take up the role of their social superiors. These rituals often allowed the organization and plotting of revolutionary actions, where groups could appropriate the general atmosphere of confusion to stage acts of rebellion.

Rock step Two weight changes, either left, right or right, left — commonly a step backwards (with weight), followed by replacing weight onto the other foot.

Rond A toe of the straight leg draws a semicircle on the floor. In ballroom dances the direction is usually from the front to back.

Rueda Spanish: La rueda (the wheel). A rueda is a dance where all couples are in a circle.

Sailor shuffles A triple step (similar to a hornpipe) where the feet are crossed and uncrossed, e.g. Sailor step to the right: (tri) Left-foot steps Right behind the Right-foot in a loose cross (ple) Right-foot side Right to uncross the feet (step) Left-foot in-place / slightly side Left.

Sandwich Tango footwork: a “sandwich” is a step where the leader blocks the follower's foot from moving by sandwiching it in-between his feet — this is a lead for follower to keep that foot in-place while the leader does some other footwork, to release the follower's foot.

Saturnalia Roman festival honoring the god of Saturn and marked by the switching of roles, often between masters and slaves. Notably, such switching led to states of intoxication and absurdity, where each was allowed to behave otherwise.

Second Corners In folk dance, when men are in a row facing the ladies in a separate row, the second corners are the last man and the first lady, i.e. a diagonally facing couple.

Shaman Appearing in numerous cultures, the shaman is generally understood as someone who has the ability to communicate the spirit world. Notably, a shaman may communicate with both good and evil spirits, often acting as a "medicine man" or "witch doctor" for acts of healing or exorcism. Shamans mostly incorporate musical instruments, such as drums and bells, along with exaggerated movements of the body during spiritual acts.

Shine Unpartnered (solo) dancing in Salsa — footwork (almost like simple tap dancing), spins, body ripples, shimmies, etc. within the framework of the salsa musical timing and rhythm.

Slotted move A slotted move is a dance move where the follower is led so that they keep within a slot, any spins and turns will keep the follower within the slot, i.e. they are not led in “random” directions. Basically the follower is the “centre of the universe” — the leader must “dodge” out of the follower's way.

Speaking in Tongues or "glossolalia" is a practice appearing within Christianity, and is understood as an ecstatic gift where one receives the spirit of God directly into one's body resulting in magical words in the form of unintelligible utterances. Linked to erratic displays and contortions of the body, and often forming the central action within group congregation.

Spotty-dog effect Slang: Dancing so that the arms and legs on the same side, move in the same direction (forwards / backwards) at the same time — reminiscent of the spotty dog puppet from “The Wooden Tops” (a black and white BBC children's television programme) — sometimes seen (in error) if the arms and legs get out of synchronisation in a Charleston. Opposite to “normal” walking (marching) when arms and legs on the same side move in opposite directions at the same time.

Square Dance is a dance where four couples dance together, each couple is at the side of a square facing inwards.

Star A left (right) hand star is a folk dance move where dancers place their left (right) hands in the centre and move round in a circle anticlockwise (clockwise).

Stroll Line dancing for hep-cats. Often used at 1950's Rock'n'Roll dances to dance to slower numbers.

Tail feather Hands are held behind the back (near the small of the back) palms facing outwards — fingers wiggling. Usually combined with bending forwards at the waist (backside sticking out) to yield a bird-like posture.

Tick-tock A tick-tock is a step where the dancer moves sideways by swivelling the feet symmetrically from the toes and knees pointing together, to the heels pointing together and the knees apart. For example, when moving to the right, the weight transfer will change from left heel and right toe, to left toe and right heel. Hands and arms can mirror the feet.

Time Step In tap dancing, the Time Step is a recognizable rhythmic tap combination. The term comes from the time of great tap dancers that used their distinctive Time Step to tell the band the desired tempo.

Triple-step Three weight changes, either left, right. left or right, left, right — can be used to replace a single weight change (step). Triple steps are often performed as a syncopated chassé, i.e. three steps in two musical beats. Triple steps can travel in any direction, e.g. forwards / backwards, sometimes with a lock-step, or fish-tail in

Ballroom dances.

UCP Abbreviation: Up Close, and Personal — a succinct description of moves where partners are close to each other.

Volta Starting with say Left-foot crossed loosely in front of Right-foot. Uncross Right-foot by stepping it (on the ball of the foot, slight body rise). Right to the side on the “a”. Cross Left-foot loosely in front of Right-foot on the beat (on flat foot, slight body lower). Repeat. a 1, a 2, a 3,...

Voodoo is a religion originating from the country of Haiti and is based on the merging of the beliefs of Christianity with West Africa (brought over by slaves). The practice of Voodoo involves the singing of songs, each based or related to specific deities - when the songs are sung it is believed the deity appears to the congregation. This often leads to individuals being "possessed" by the deity.

Walk is probably the most basic dance move. It exists in almost every dance. Walks approximately correspond normal walking steps, taking into the account the basic technique of the dance in question. (For example, in Latin dance walks the toe hits the floor first, rather than the heel.) In dance descriptions the term *walk* is usually applied when two or more steps are taken in the same direction. A single step, e.g., forward, is called just thus: 'step forward'. Walks can be done in various dance positions: in closed position, promenade position, shadow position, sweetheart position, etc. Curved walks are done along a curve, rather than along a straight line.