

Waltz Basics**Pre-requisite**

None

(These are basic patterns)

Introduction

The Waltz in country-and-western dancing is a progressive dance meaning that it moves continually down the floor. Like its ballroom sister, it is characterized by a rise and fall, or rather a fall and rise as the dancers complete one basic set of steps.

However, ballroom Waltz tends to zigzag down the floor with the partners forming an hourglass shape as they hold each other closed opposed (meaning closed but on separate tracks). Country and western Waltz borrows this on occasion but dancers spend most of their time moving in a straight line with the partners only slightly offset. Ballroom dancers who try to dance ballroom style on a country and western floor will experience frequent collisions with other dancers.

The Waltz has a long history (see the histories section) that goes back to the 18th century. It owes much to the Russian Czar Alexander who made it popular by dancing it himself in public; to changing clothing styles in the 19th century that caused it to be danced in flowing, rhythmic steps; and to British dance teachers who defined the patterns and brought back its popularity after waning during World War I when it was associated with German invaders.

In this segment, we are going to discuss:

- The music – how to step to the beat and how determine if it is a Waltz.
- Contact – how to hold your partner.
- The basic foot work.

The Music

Traditional Waltz music is flowing. It is made up of an exceptionally heavy first beat followed by two lighter beats. Then, there is a heavy fourth beat followed by two lighter beats to complete a phrase.

Typical Waltz is danced to such ballroom songs as “The Viennese Waltz” as many other old favorites. Country and western Waltz is danced to such songs as “Waltzing Matilda”, “Waltz Across Texas”, “Stars Over Texas”, and “Old Friends”.

The Count

There are six counts in the Waltz – three for either side. The one count and the four count are very heavy and drawn out, while the two, three counts and the five, six counts are quicker and more light.

If you listen carefully, you will hear that the one count is normally heavier than the four count. Not knowing this, beginning dancers often begin dancing where the four count should be and know no difference. To experienced dancers, these beginners look strangely off beat to the music.

Another quirk about the Waltz is that you might also note that the one count on the first phrase (or basics of six counts) is heavier than the one count on the following seven phrases. In other words, the music is generally played in a repeating set of eight phrases. A way to determine this is to listen for when the singing begins. The first phrase always begins when the singers begin to sing.

The one count is where the gentleman steps forward in a walking step on the heel of his left foot and the lady steps back on the toe of her right. The lighter four count is for the gentleman's right foot and the lady's left. This large step on both sides causes the height of the couple to lower somewhat.

The two and the five count are taken on bent knees and are where the couple begin to rise gracefully to maximum height taken on the three and six count. Unlike ballroom, the two, three count and the five, six count are taken with passing feet so the couple progress down the line of dance. (In ballroom, these steps are taken as side together to bring the forward motion to some what of a pause.)

All steps are taken on beats of music and are counted (heavy and drawn out) ONE, then two, three, followed by count (heavy and drawn out) FOUR, then five, six.

What is a beat?

A beat in music is a heavy guitar strum, a drumbeat, or some other heavy sound in the music. It is the **natural** place you would snap your fingers or clap your hands if you were keeping time to the music.

The important thing to remember here is that in dance, you put your foot on the floor on the beat as opposed to picking it up. To practice, you can snap your fingers and stamp your feet as you listen to the music (guys use the left foot and ladies use the right.)

Is it a Waltz?

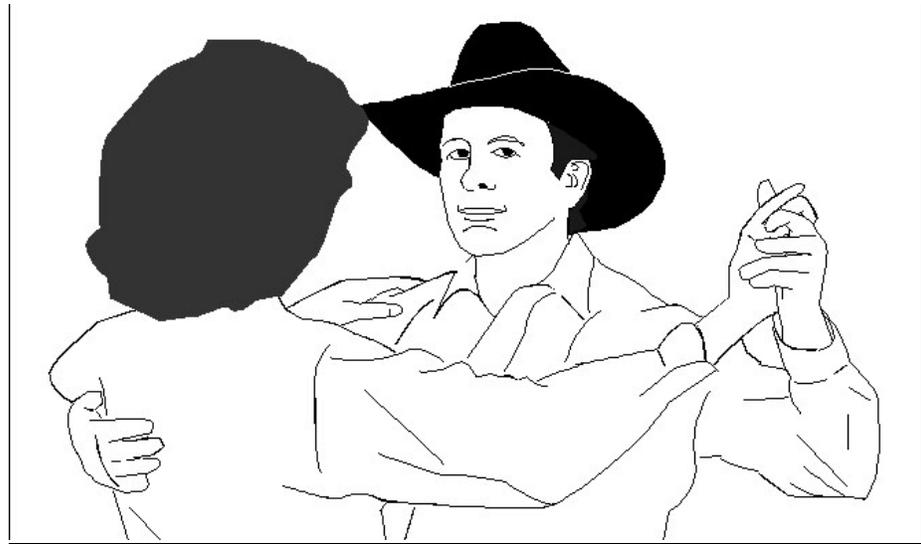
Listen to the music. Listen for the heavy downbeats to begin counting. If you can comfortably say, “ONE, two, three, FOUR, five six” and stay in beat with the music, this is probably a Waltz.

An alternative is to watch what other dancers are doing before you go out onto the floor. If they are generally dancing with a fall and rise motion, it is probably a Waltz.

If you still cannot determine what it is, ask someone nearby. Most dancers are friendly and they will be glad to tell you.

Contact

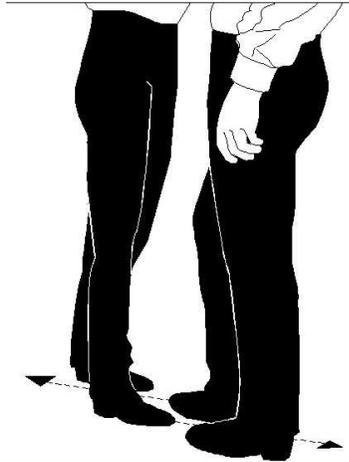
Face each other. Gentleman faces forward and lady faces backward. Be sure that you will be moving counter-clockwise around the floor.



Gentlemen – Put your right hand under the lady’s left arm and place it gently on her left shoulder blade. Keep your fingers together and turn the tip of your hand down so that it raises your right elbow to create a shelf for the lady to rest her arm. Hold your left hand out to the side about level with her chin but below her eyes. Hold your palm forward and fingers pointing to the outside to create a fence for her right hand.

Ladies – Rest your left elbow on the gentleman’s arm and cup your left hand on the ball of his right shoulder. Gently rest your right hand on top of the gentleman’s left hand. Lady’s arms should look parallel from the back.

Finally, hold each other slightly offset so that your right foot is pointing between your partner's feet.



We do three things to prevent stepping on each other's toes:

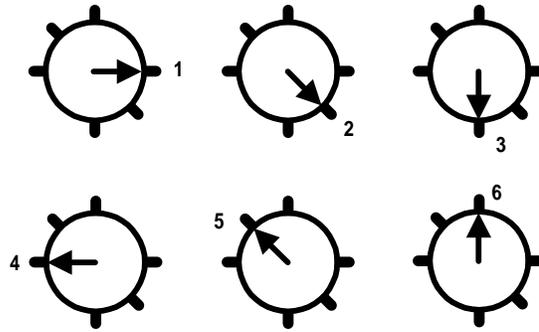
1. Ladies and gentlemen dance with opposite footwork – guys start with the left foot and ladies start with the right foot. Provided they are facing each other, as the gentleman steps forward with his left, the lady steps back with her right and there is always a place to put the foot.
2. Ladies and gentlemen dance parallel but offset to each other so that the right foot is lined up to always pass between the partner's feet. This prevents bumping knees and toes.
3. Ladies and gentlemen keep their feet fairly close to the floor when they step to prevent stepping on your partner if all else fails. Avoid dragging your feet – it is unsightly, it creates an irritating sound, and it will quickly wear out your shoes.

Connection and Frame

The connection and frame is created by leaning slightly in toward your partner and keeping a tension in your elbows. The gentleman should hold the clasped hands somewhere about the height of the lady's shoulders.

Try it out. If you would like to learn more of connection and frame, refer to the on-line segment entitled "connection and frame."

The Waltz dance clock



Unlike the regular clock, the Waltz dance clock is divided into six segments to correspond to the beats of the basic Waltz music. Clocks for other dances will be different. The spaces between the markers along the outside of the clock represent full beats of music, and the arrow points to the beat representing the step being taken.

Steps number 1 and 4 are walking steps. You will note that the spaces leading up to them are large – in fact they occupy $\frac{1}{4}$ the face of the clock. The combined steps 2, 3 and 5,6 take up $\frac{1}{4}$ the face each.

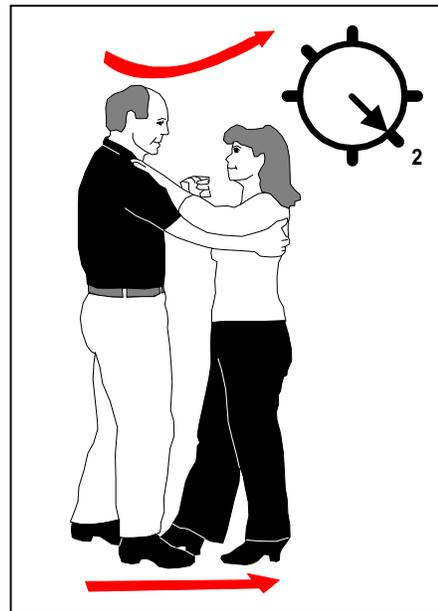
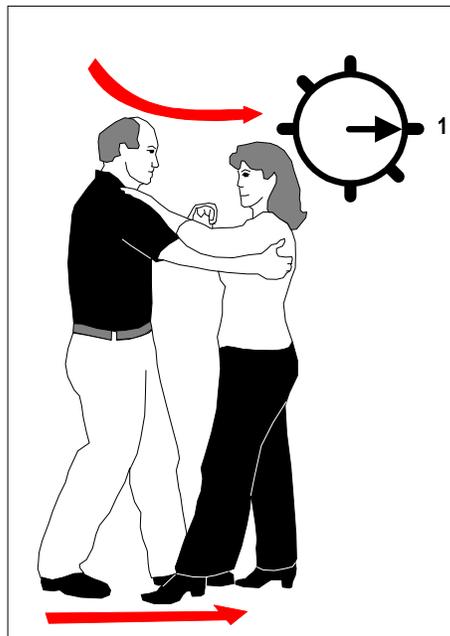
Count Timing

An important point to note is that the timing occurs before the step, not after it. Therefore, the timing for the first step occurs after the step 6 and is drawn out so the foot is traveling slowly in the allotted time space.

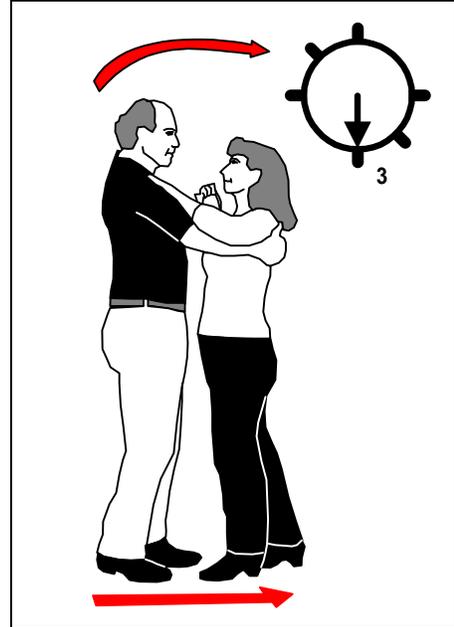
Basic Steps

The First Half

Note the fall of step 1. The fall is created by the gentleman stepping forward on his heel with a long drawn out step. Lady steps back on her toes. The rise begins on step 2.

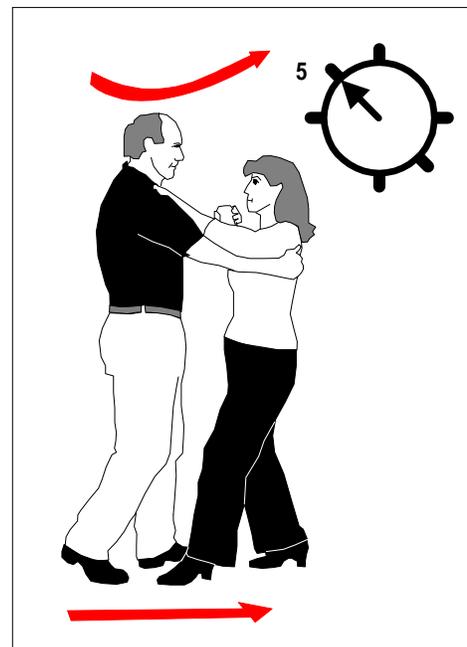
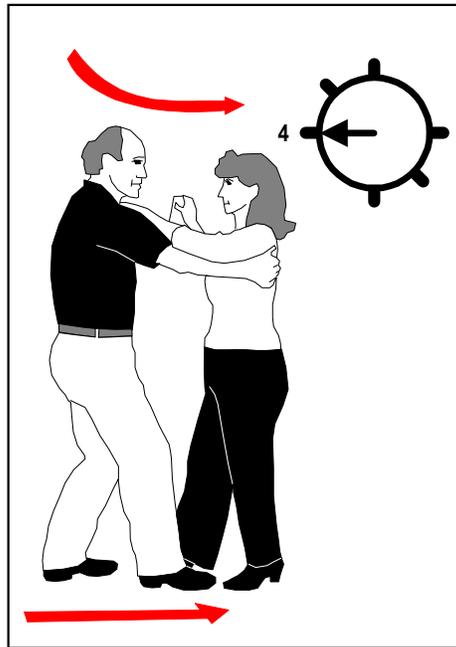


On the step of 3, the dancers reach the peak of their rise on the balls of their feet.

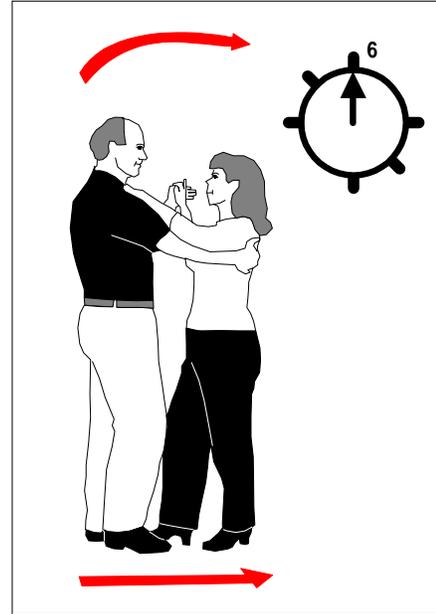


The Second Half

Note again that on the count of 4, the dancers take one long drawn out step. The gentleman steps forward on his heel and the lady steps back on her toes. Step 5 begins the rise on this side.



Last Basic Step Step 6 is similar to step 3 in that the dancers are still passing their feet, but they are at their highest point on the balls of their feet.



Don't be Afraid Every dancer out there has “paid their dues”. They have struggled just like you. However, they are concentrating on their own efforts and not upon you. They do not care if you make a mistake, so go ahead and make them. You have just as much right to be on the dance floor as they do, so get out there and dance. It may be a struggle, but that is ok. Dance as if no one is watching you.

Protect your Lady As you are dancing, check often around you to be aware of the traffic that is happening nearby. Do not compel your lady to collide with another dancer and do not allow them to collide with her. Take smaller steps or maneuver her as necessary into an open spot. The Waltz is a progressive dance, and you can maneuver on the floor if you pay attention. Avoid collisions with other dancers.

Take the Blame If a collision does occur, remember that it does no one any good to get upset – this is just recreation. The best policy is to apologize regardless if it is your fault or not.

And last, but not least – if you do bump into someone and knock over their drink, offer to replace it, and try to be more careful.

Conclusion The material presented here is not all-inclusive, but only touches the high points. There are many other tips to help in your Waltz technique. Some of these tips will be presented in the course of other dance segments, while others may have to be taught in conjunction with an instructor present.

This concludes the segment on basic Waltz.