

One Step

Quotes are from "Modern Dancing", by Vernon and Irene Castle. Comments in square brackets by Stan Isaacs. Abbreviations: M for man, W for woman, R for right (foot or direction), L for left (foot or direction), fwd: forward, bwd: backward, ptr: partner, CW: clockwise (around room or partner), CCW: counterclockwise, LOD: Line of Direction (CCW around the room), OLOD: opposite LOD, ct: count (as in ct 1 for the first beat in a measure or phrase, ct 2 for the second), ft: foot.

Basic Ballroom Position:

"Dancers stand directly in front of each other, the lady's right hand in the gentleman's left. The elbows should be slightly bent, not held stiffly, like the bowsprit of a boat, as this not only looks awkward, but is uncomfortable and often dangerous to the other dancers. The gentleman's right hand should be a little above the lady's waist-line, more or less over her left shoulder-blade; but this, of course, depends upon the size of the lady. ... the lady's left hand should rest lightly on the gentleman's right shoulder. She should not curl her arm tightly around his." [Stand slightly offset in front of partner, so right foot will step between partners, not on it.]

Basic Walk:

"The gentleman starts forward with his left foot, and the lady steps backward with her right, walking in time to the music. Bear in mind this one important point: When I say walk, that is all it is. Do not shuffle, do not bob up and down or trot. Simply walk as softly and smoothly as possible, taking a step to every count of the music...."

Castle Walk:

"... Now, raise yourself up slightly on your toes at each step, with the legs a trifle stiff, and breeze along happily and easily, and you know all there is to know about the Castle Walk."

Yale Position:

Dancers stand with right shoulders adjacent. Hands are as in Ballroom Position, except accommodating the new placement. Reverse Yale Position puts left shoulders adjacent.

Pomander Turn:

With right shoulders adjacent, both men and women walk fwd or bwd. Can also be done with left shoulders adjacent.

Grapevine:

Facing ptr, M back to center of circle, ballroom position, man does grapevine steps to his L, starting by stepping L foot to L side (ct 1), R in front of L (ct 2), L to L side (ct 3), R behind L (ct 4). W start to her R, crossing in front at the same time as the M.

Marcel Wave:

Same as Grapevine, but while M steps in front, W steps behind (R shoulders adjacent), and while M steps behind, W steps in front (L shoulders adjacent.)

Wrap-Up:

Man: 2 steps directly away from ptr, starting L, retaining hold of W's R hand in M's L. (If you have been backing the W, the two steps are almost in place.) (ct 1,2); Take 2 steps in place, rotating to L about 1/4 turn. Bring W's L hand to M's R shoulder and let go (ct 3,4); Step L to L with bent L leg, continuing turn started in cts 3-4, leaving R ft where it was (ct 5); push off from L ft to step R, turning back to face LOD. Put R arm around W's waist at tend (ct 6); returning to Ballroom Position, step L to L side (ct 7); Step R next to L (ct 8).

Woman: 2 steps directly away from ptr, starting R, holding R hand in M's L (ct 1,2); Walk CW around M, 4 steps, dropping R hand about ct 5, ending in front of M with R hand at M's L shoulder (ct 3-6); Sliding R hand up shoulder to M's L hand, return to Ballroom Position and step R to R (ct 7); Step L next to R (ct 8). [This step is actually much easier to do than to describe.]

Wrap-Up and Turn:

Dance cts 1-6 of Wrap-Up, but at the end, W pulls M's L shoulder to start a pivot turn (ct 1-6); In Ballroom Position, pivot 2 steps (L, R), turning once around to R (CW), using the momentum of ct 6 to get started. Woman's R hand should slide up shoulder to M's L hand (ct 7-8). Pivot turns can then be continued as long as desired.

Pivot Turns:

There are several forms of pivot turns. The one I recommend for one-step or Castle Walk is: in Ballroom Position, M facing out, W facing in, M turns to face OLOD, while stepping L foot across in front of W, and W steps directly in LOD, between M's feet (ct 1); Then, continuing the CW turn, M steps directly forward in LOD between ptr's feet, with R foot twisted to the R, as W steps a very small step to her L on her L ft, facing OLOD. This allows you to travel in LOD very fast, and control where you go by directing the R foot each time it steps.

Fours:

In Yale Position, Castle Walk 4 steps fwd in LOD (ct 1-4); Both ptrs rotate CW 1/2, to reverse Yale Position (L shoulders adjacent), and Castle Walk 4 more steps, M bwd, W fwd, continuing LOD (ct 5-8)

Circle:

In Ballroom Position, Castle Walk fwd. Start leaning over slightly, to M's L and W's R, bringing raised arms downward to point to M's L side. This should naturally "... cause you to go round in a circle. Now continue, and get your circle smaller and smaller until you are walking around almost in one spot, and then straighten up and start off down the room again. It sounds silly and is silly. That is the explanation of its popularity!"

Zig-Zag:

In reverse Yale Position, Castle Walk 3 steps diagonally R, somewhat out of the circle (ct 1-3); Pointing free foot to side, swivel to Yale Position, facing diagonally L (ct 4). Repeat in Yale Position.

Spin:

Buzz turn in Ballroom Position, R feet adjacent, pushing with L. (W has to change feet to do this variation.)

One Step Cortez:

Castle Walk fwd, bringing W to M's R side (ct 1-2), and back in front of him (ct 3-4).

Castle Eights:

In open position, both facing LOD, take 2 steps fwd (ct 1,2); M step L across in front of W, while she takes a small step fwd - he is starting to turn completely around CW, finishing facing LOD on the next step (ct 3); Take 2 steps fwd, LOD, with shoulders leading (M's R and W's L are pointing LOD) (ct 4,5); W steps L across in front of M while he takes a small step fwd, ending in original position as the next step starts (ct 6). This can be repeated as many times as desired, but a good number is 2 times, with a grapevine at the end, to end on a phrase.

Step and Pivot:

Do 6 counts of Grapevine, in open position, moving LOD, then 2 counts to do one Pivot Turn. This is an easy way to practice pivoting. Then try 2 counts of Grapevine and a Pivot Turn, a few times in a row. Then try 4 counts of Grapevine with 2 pivot turns. Once that is comfortable, you can do as many pivot turns as you desire!

General dance notes:

"Castle's Suggestions For Correct Dancing:

- Do not wriggle the shoulders.
- Do not shake the hips.
- Do not twist the body.
- Do not flounce the elbows.
- Do not pump the arms.
- Do not hop - glide instead.

Also, Stand far enough away from each other to allow free movement of the body in order to dance gracefully and comfortably. The gentleman should rest his hand lightly against the lady's back, touching her with the finger-tips and wrist only, or, if preferred, with the inside of the wrist and the back of the thumb. The gentleman's left hand and forearm should be held up in the air parallel with his body, with the hand extended, holding the lady's hand lightly on his palm. The arm should never be straightened out."

Remember:

For the leads, keep doing whatever step you are dancing until you have made up your mind what you want to do next; then change so that your partner will also know what the new step will be. During the Ragtime Era, people didn't change steps as often as we do today, and they generally danced on the musical phrases. If you know a step from another dance, try it. Also, don't forget the basic principle of dance: have fun and be careful of the other dancers.

-- Stan Isaacs, 2006