

# FOXTROT CHARACTERISTICS

*This is a compilation of information from, Ballroom Dancing (A.E. Moore), Technique of Ballroom Dancing (Guy Howard), Just One Idea (Len Scrivener) & various personal contacts. This column is devoted to help promote comfortable dancing and confidence, it is not meant as an absolute. - Chris & Terri Cantrell*

**CHARACTERISTIC:** Foxtrot is one of the most beautiful and most difficult modern ballroom rhythms. The two main categories of foxtrot, include the Social Foxtrot (aka American Foxtrot, one of the Rhythm Dances) and the Slow Foxtrot (aka International Foxtrot).

Social Foxtrot figures closely resemble figures done in quickstep, but much slower. You will often hear the basic figure in Social Foxtrot called the magic step – forward, forward, side, close (slow, slow, quick, quick).

It is most often taught in many of the major dance studios, including the Arthur Murray Dance Studio.

Social Foxtrot is more conducive to crowded dance floors. A delightful history of Social Foxtrot on

<http://www.streetswing.com/histmain/z3foxtrt.htm>.

The Slow Foxtrot is characterized by long, gliding, smooth steps. A great amount of control is needed in order to give the dance a lazy and unhurried appearance. It is more easily danced on a large, uncrowded dance floor or a floor in which all of the couples are traveling the same direction (e.g. Round Dancing). The discussion below deals with Slow Foxtrot, the type most typically done in Round Dancing.

**TIMING:** Foxtrot music is played in 4/4 timing (four beats to each measure/bar) with three steps taken over the four beats of music. The tempo of foxtrot is most often 30 measures per minute. Beats one and three are generally accented, with beat one being the stronger.

**RHYTHM:** The basic rhythm of foxtrot is SLOW, QUICK, QUICK. For the purpose of this discussion, SLOW (S) equals two beats of music and QUICK (Q) equals one beat of music.

Interpretation of the music is largely a matter of personal taste, but a good hint is to be a little late with the second QUICK.

**BODY MECHANICS:** Foxtrot is much easier to execute if correct body mechanics are used. We have listed a few key points. Keep your body weight well over your supporting foot. Maintain a good top line (head to rib cage region). Keep your head over your feet. Keep your knees relaxed, never locked. Keep tone in your arms using the back of the upper arm (triceps) instead of the front muscle (biceps).

**SWAY:** The sway is an inclination of the body, this action may assist dancers in maintaining their balance and can add to the beauty and enjoyment of the movement. The action of the sway should come from the diaphragm, not the shoulders, stretching one side while collapsing the other.

Sways may be used on nearly all figures that curve, wave or turn, with the exception of quick spins. The sway is strongly associated with the Contrary Body Movement (CBM) step used in all turning figures. For example, if the CBM is achieved with the right foot, then the inclination of the sway should be to the right. The sway is generally changed during the SLOW step and then reestablished during the QUICK steps.

**MOVEMENT:** Foxtrot movement involves long, gliding steps. The second step may be slightly shorter due to the rising action, while the third step may be slightly longer to assist in giving the figure a smooth, flowing appearance.

**FORWARD MOVEMENT:** With a soft knee in the supporting leg (i.e. right), swing the free foot forward from the hip (i.e. left foot). As the step is being taken, release the heel of the supporting foot (i.e. right foot). Take the step with the heel of the free foot (i.e. left foot). Gather the initial supporting foot under the body (i.e. right foot). Step 1 usually ends with a slight rise. This movement in Foxtrot is taken with Contrary Body Movement (CBM). Step one is taken as a SLOW.

The second and third steps are taken with the toe/ball of the foot with a body sway to the left. Step 2 generally remains in a risen position and you lower at the end of step 3. Step three often ends with Contrary Body Movement Position (CBMP). Step two and three are usually QUICKS.

**BACKWARD MOVEMENT:** With a soft knee in the supporting leg (i.e. left), reach the free foot, leg and hip back with the toe of the foot (i.e. right foot). As you take weight on the free foot, drag the heel of the supporting foot back until it is collected under the body.

**SHOULDER LEAD:** The Shoulder Lead occurs when a shoulder moves in the direction that the figure moves.

**CONTRARY BODY MOVEMENT:** Contrary Body Movement (CBM) is the action of turning the opposite hip and shoulder towards the direction of the moving leg, and is used to begin all turning movements. The simplest way to initiate CBM is to precede it by a shoulder lead. Then simply step forward or backward with no additional body or shoulder rotation.

**CONTRARY BODY MOVEMENT POSITION:** Contrary Body Movement Position (CBMP) is the position attained when either foot is placed across the front or the back of the body without body turn. For example, steps taken in Banjo (BJO) position should end in CBMP.