

ANIMAL FIGURES

BY HAROLD & MEREDITH SEARS



In the early 1900s, during the Ragtime Era, a whole flock of "animal dances" were briefly popular, formed out of the earlier Two-Step. There was the Squirrel, in which dancers assumed closed position and took small, mincing steps. The Duck Waddle involved quick walks swaying the upper body left and right. In the Snake, dancers walked sinuously to banjo with a dip and then to sidecar. There was a Lamé Duck, Chicken Scratch, Chicken Shuffle, Turkey Trot, Kangaroo Hop, Horse Canter, and a Grizzly Bear.

Now, a hundred years later, we have moved beyond these silly, Roaring Twenties, flapper, 23-skidoo kinds of dances. We are more sophisticated. We don't do animal dances, but we do have quite a flock of "animal" figures.

Domesticated Animals—



Chicken Walks are common in Jive. In left open facing position, the man facing line of dance, lead hands joined, the man walks backward four steps, and he leads the woman to walk forward, gently pulling and causing her to swivel a bit with each step. She steps with her right and swivels the foot a bit to the right, turning the toes out or really turning the heel in, then steps left and swivels left on the ball of the foot so the toes point out again, and so on. He leads her to make these little swiveling turns by turning her lead hand left and then right. He turns the hand in the direction that he wants her to swivel. The men can dance this figure with soft knees and maybe a kind of "coaxing" attitude: "Come on, baby." —and the woman leans back away from him with something of a resisting attitude: "No, I'm not giving in easily." She might be a little haughty. You have to play around with that sort of styling, but do try for some kind of "attitude." Don't just walk.

Rooster Walks are not as common. In left open facing position, lead foot free, the man stands tall, puffs out his chest, and struts forward. Think domineering thoughts. Push her ahead of you. While you're being "cocky," she is the temptress—"Yes, big boy. What game do you have in mind?"



The **Horse & Cart** is a Rumba figure, but we have seen it in Bolero and in Slow Two-Step. In brief, the woman is the horse and the man is the cart. She moves him in a left-face circle up to two revolutions using up to 11 small running steps. Obviously, the connection between the horse and cart must be firm. We might be in skaters position, where the man can place his right hand on the front of the woman's right hip bone—she can pull at this point. He also maintains a toned left arm, and she can

push him around at this left-left connection. The man steps forward on his left foot into the figure, but then he extends his right leg to the side in a *ronde* action and simply swivels left face with the left knee flexed and the right leg straight and the inside edge of the right toe skimming the floor.

Pests—

In Jive, we have **Flea Hops**, which are little syncopated movements—1/a, 2/a, ... We might be in open, shadow, or tandem position, with the left foot free for both. We hop on the right foot by lifting the left knee up and to the left. This action will cause the hop and a slight slide to the left. Close left to right. On the second beat, repeat this action with the right knee: hop/close. On the third beat, hop on the right sliding left and then tap the left toe near the right foot. Hop and then close left to right. On beat five, hop on left sliding a little to the right and tap right. Finally, hop left and close right. Flea Hops can be done with opposite footwork, too.

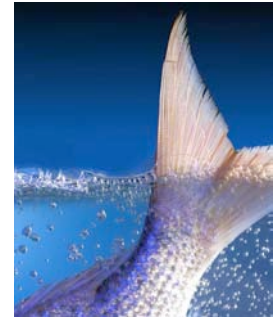


More familiar is the **Cucaracha**. In Rumba, we step to the side, recover, and then close (with either foot). These side steps are pressing steps; full weight is not taken. So in the first measure, you might step to the side with your lead foot, press with the ball of the foot, but don't lower the heel and don't raise the heel of the trail foot. A little rotation of the ball of the lead foot would be appropriate. Then recover full weight to the trail foot, and close the lead foot to the trail foot. Cucaracha is Spanish for "cockroach." It's not an entirely attractive image, but in an earthy sort of way, we kind of like the idea of squishing a roach to the left and then to the right??



Marine Life—

In Two-Step and Quickstep, we dance a **Fishtail**. In banjo position, the man crosses his left foot in back of his right, and the woman crosses her right in front. He steps side on his right, progressing a little down line, forward left (woman back right), and then cross left behind right (woman crosses in front again). To put a little more swivel in it and make it more "fishy," we try to use strong shoulder lead. In contra banjo position, the man has left-side lead. As you cross behind, change to right-side lead. On the side R, lose the right-side lead. Step fwd L changing to L-side lead, and cross R behind L with L-side lead. You might call this a "swivel fishtail."



The **Whaletail** is a common figure, too—an extended Fishtail. In banjo position, do your Fishtail, and then in the second measure, step side on the lead foot, close turning left, cross in back, and step side.

For **Crab Walks**, we are usually in butterfly Rumba, we both cross the trail foot in front, the lead foot, and then cross in front again (slow). In the second measure, step side, and step side. Of course, we may travel to starting with lead foot.



position. In step side with (quick, quick, cross in front, reverse



The **Scallop** is a Mambo figure. In semi-closed position, facing line of dance, we rock back on our lead foot, recover to face, and step side. In the second measure, we step thru, side, and close, ending in butterfly or closed position. We can use little Rondes to trace scallop-shell shapes as we take the first, third, and fifth steps.

Terrestrial Wild Life—



The **Bunny Run** is not a Roundalab standard, but in the Gosses' Quickstep *We Are In Love* there is a Pivot 4 to closed position facing reverse and wall. We step back on our right foot (woman forward left) to banjo position and then Bunny Run 8. The running steps are back for the man, on the toes with a slight body turn on each step. Step back left (woman fwd R) turning slightly to the right, back right turning slightly left, and so on—little “contra” steps.

The **Woodpecker** is danced standing on either foot, usually in closed position. We hop and tap the toe of the free foot behind in one count of music. Hop up on a half count and land and tap on the second half count. Rarely would we do just one woodpecker—we might do four woodpeckers over a measure of music. It is also common to turn as a couple in place as you dance them—Turning Woodpeckers.



And speaking of pecking, Lindy has a figure called **Pecking**. In semi-closed position, facing line of dance, we rock back on the lead foot and recover. On beat 3, the man steps forward on the left foot and holds, head up and back. The woman steps forward on the right foot, turns left face, closes on the left foot facing the man, and steps side and back. The man has taken three steps: back, recover, forward, hold. The woman has taken five steps: back, recover, fwd turning left/close, and back. Both have the trail feet free. In the second measure, the man steps forward R pushing his chin forward like a chicken pecking, and the woman steps back. She may peck back at him or not. We repeat the pecking with the left foot, and again with the right. On the & count of beat 3, close L turning left face to semi-closed facing reverse, and step back on count 4. Now we might repeat the figure toward reverse line of dance.

Finally, we have our basket of **Snakes**, which have an even-count, Merengue feel, but which could be slipped into just about any of the slower Latin rhythms for a change-of-pace interlude. This basket includes the Snake, which we first encountered in the Shibatas' *Dancez Merengue*, the Worlocks' Slow Snake from the Jive *Caldonia*, and their Inverted Snake from the Cha *A La Playa*, the Pretzel Wrap from the Rothers' West Coast Swing *Mint Julep* (1988), and The Scrambler from the Rumbles' Jive *Safronia B*.



In most Snakes, the steps are even and mostly in place—you don't progress. Second, you usually have a double handhold (man's left to woman's right and his right to her left) and you don't let go. Third, as you step out the beats, you turn under your joined hands, one way and then the other, hands going up and down as you turn, until you end up back in a calm facing position again. I suppose it's the arms going up and down and twisting as you turn that makes the figure look "snaky." They're complicated figures. When we learn (or relearn) any one of them, we usually feel unable to do any other, as if there is room for one Snake only in our memory bank, but if you can do a Snake smoothly, without breaking any limbs, it can feel pretty good—sinuous.

In the Shibatas' Snake, we begin in butterfly position facing wall, lead foot free. In the first measure, the man raises lead hands, steps left, right, left, right, and as he does so, he turns to the left $\frac{3}{4}$ under those joined hands. He will turn first to line, to center, and finally to reverse. While the man does this, the woman steps right, left, right, left, and turns to the right only $\frac{1}{4}$. At the end of the measure, we lower lead hands and find ourselves side-by-side, left hip to left hip in a sort of hammer-lock position with his left hand in front of her and at her right hip, and her left hand behind his back with his right arm bent behind his back. Again, she is facing line on the outside of the circle and he is facing reverse on the inside of the circle. One secret to making the arms work is to hold hands very lightly—really just touch fingers and let your hands turn against each other as you turn.

In the second measure, we again take four steps. We raise our lead hands back up again, and both turn $\frac{1}{4}$ to the right in two steps. She turns under those lead hands. Lower the arms and we will be standing back-to-back, he facing center, she facing wall. Now raise the trail hands (man's right and woman's left), and as we step twice, both turn $\frac{1}{4}$ to the right. She turns under trail hands. Lower the hands and we are side-by-side again but right hip to right hip. Now the lead hands are at the man's back and the trail hands are in front of her and at the woman's left hip, man facing line of dance and woman reverse.

In the third measure, we raise the trail hands again. She begins to turn $\frac{1}{4}$ to the right. He can briefly look at her through a window formed by the curve of his right arm. The man puts his head through that window and turns $\frac{3}{4}$ to the left, turning under his own right arm, and we end in butterfly wall, as we began.

In the Worlocks' Inverted Snake, again we begin in butterfly position facing the wall. Here, we begin by raising the trail hands. He turns $\frac{1}{4}$ to the right in four steps: L, R, L, R. She turns $\frac{3}{4}$ to the left under those same raised arms: R, L, R,

L. We lower our arms in front, and we are side-by-side, left hip to left hip. Trail hands are in front of the man and lead hands are behind the woman in a hammerlock. He is facing reverse. She is facing line.

In the second measure, he raises his right hand, turns $\frac{1}{4}$ right face under it in two steps (she turns $\frac{1}{4}$ to right), and lowers hands, quickly raises left hand and turns $\frac{1}{4}$ to right under those hands in two steps (she turns $\frac{1}{4}$ more), and lowers hands. Note he has turned under trail hands and then under lead hands. She turns under no hands. Both have turned $\frac{1}{2}$ to right. End side-by-side, right hip to right hip, lead hands in front of man, and trail hands behind woman in a hammer-lock.



In third measure, we raise lead hands and turn woman $\frac{3}{4}$ to left under lead hands in four steps. Man turns $\frac{1}{4}$ to right. We end in butterfly position facing the wall as we began.

The Rothers' Pretzel Wrap takes four measures, and for the woman there is a touch in measure three to wrapped position and a bit of syncopation in measure four, but for the man, it is completely Snake-like.

Finally, the Rumbles' The Scrambler is by far the busiest Snake in the basket, so the name is a good one. For this one, we begin with crossed hands—a right-right handshake with left hands joined on top—facing wall, and the count will be “rock, recover, and four triples.” We rock apart on the lead foot, and recover raising left hands. During the first triple, the man turns $\frac{1}{4}$ to the right and turns the woman $\frac{3}{4}$ to the left. The woman has turned in place under raised left hands, and the man has turned the couple $\frac{1}{4}$ to the right—we are in a facing position, man facing reverse, now with right hands crossed on top. Now it is the man's turn. During the second triple, he raises right hands and turn one full turn. The couple does not turn. During the third triple, he raises left hands and turns the woman $\frac{3}{4}$ to the left while turning the couple $\frac{1}{4}$ to the right. Now we are facing partner, man facing center, with right hands crossed on top. During the fourth triple, he raises right hands and turns one full turn to the right back to our starting position but having turned $\frac{1}{2}$ to face center.

It is helpful to think about The Scrambler, among the other Snakes, because in comparison, it makes those Snakes seem slow, sinuous, languorous—snaky. Did I say The Scrambler was “busy?” It is frantic. You need to be prepared for that figure—mind, body, and soul. If I think about it for another five minutes, I'll probably take it back out of the snake basket and let it stand on its own again—The Scrambler.