

# Cha-Cha-Cha

Often, we dance the cha-cha-cha as a simple chasse, with the second step a closing step — side-close-side, forward-close-forward, back-close-back — but there are other ways to cha that add variety to our dancing and that help us connect with our partner and dance more smoothly and comfortably. Let's do a common sequence: Open Hip Twist, Fan, and Hockey Stick.

In an Open Hip Twist, the man steps forward on his left foot and recovers right, and the woman steps back right and recovers left. Now, instead of doing his first cha as a little back chasse — back/close, back — he could try a **Slip Chasse**. He reaches a little farther back on beat 3, pulls the right foot toward but not up to the left on the &, and then closes with the left. This “slip” imparts just a little forward movement to his body, movement toward his partner rather than away from her, as she dances her cha toward him. If he tones his lead arm, his body movement gives a little push and so leads her Hip Twist at the end of her cha. Notice that he doesn't push her with his left hand. It is overall body movement that is transmitted through the lead arms. The result is more gentle. Here, at the end of beat 4, her Hip Twist will just happen; she won't even have to try.

In this same Open Hip Twist, the woman might dance her forward cha not as a forward chasse — forward/close, forward — but as a **Locking Chasse** — forward right/lock left in back of right, forward right. To give the Locking Chasse a Latin touch, don't lock tightly, with the instep of one foot against the heel of the other. Instead, lock with the toes of the locking foot turned out and the ball of the locking foot against the heel of the forward foot, forming a "T." The angling of the feet will tend to angle the body and contribute to hip movement.

Both men and women — if you are dancing forward and back, try the Locking Chasse or the Slip Chasse for a more Latin look and to stay more connected with your partner.



Now let's dance the Fan. He steps small back right, and she steps forward left down line. He recovers on 2, and she steps forward right and turns sharply left face 1/2 to face reverse. On the cha, the man might do a small chasse to the right while the woman dances her back Locking Chasse down line, but again, this moves him away from her. An alternative is for the man to do a **Hip Twist Chasse** — cross right in front of left and turn hips left/close left and turn hips right, step side right. It's a little like a Single Cuban Break, but the nice feature is that the crossing step moves the



man's body a bit down line and so leads the woman's back Locking Chasse instead of pulling away from it. We end up dancing together, rather than at arm's reach.

Finally, to begin the Hockey Stick, the man steps small forward left and with pressure through the lead arms leads the woman to close right. He recovers right and the woman steps forward left. Once again, on the cha, he might just do a triple in place, as she dances her forward Locking Chasse. But he might try a **Ronde Chasse** — sweep the left foot in a small counter-clockwise arc and cross left behind right, close right to left, and step small side left — like a little Sailor Shuffle. You have yet another little Latin effect so much nicer than just stepping in place.

Any time you are dancing to one side or the other, instead of step/step, step, or side/close, side, try a Hip Twist Chasse or a Ronde Chasse. They are fun, and they can improve partner connection.

