

# THE FOXTROT & QUICKSTEP

by Harold & Meredith Sears



## Some History --

In the early days of the Twentieth Century, during the Ragtime Era, a whole flock of "animal dances" were briefly popular. There was the Squirrel, in which dancers assumed closed position and took small, mincing steps: 1&, 2&, 3&, hold, feet closed, knees soft, and up on the toes; or quick, quick, quick, quick; slow, slow. The Duck Waddle involved quick walks swaying the upper body left and right. In the Turkey Trot, the couple danced: side, hop, side, hop; side, hop, side, hop; step, hop, hop, hop; repeat. In the Snake, they walked sinuously to banjo with a dip, then to sidecar. The Grizzly Bear had the couple face to face, feet apart, crouching with soft knees, forward upper body poise, arms out and up. The footwork included walking, rocking, turning, and hopping. There was the Lamé Duck, the Chicken Scratch, the Kangaroo Hop, a Horse Canter, and a Horse Trot. And of course, there was the Fox Trot.

The Fox Trot might not have started as an "animal dance." One story tells of Harry Fox, a burlesque comic, who worked on a stage that was scattered with scantily clad women in static poses. His act involved a fast, comical dance to 4/4 music from one woman to the next where he would deliver his jokes. The act was popular, the music was widely marketed, and Fox's "Trot" became popular in dance halls and dance studios.

In these earliest days, the Foxtrot was not the smooth "slow, quick, quick" of today (which if you think about it, is nothing like a trot). Back then, dancers might have taken four slow steps down line and then eight quicks with just a little bit of a prance. They walked in a circle. There was a lunge, close, lunge, close; producing a full turn. There was a definite strutting or trotting look.



But teachers wrote new figures for the rhythm, and by 1916, this Fox Trot had evolved into a much slower, more elegant, floating kind of dance. It used long passing steps that kept the dancer up, stretched, and extended. The passing steps encourage us to keep moving, too. We want fluidity, continuity; a graceful, steady glide. Even when checking a movement or when in a picture figure, where your feet have stopped, we keep the body flowing. We introduce sway, change the sway, change it again if we have to, incorporate arm and hand movements that extend these body movements, and then flow right on out into the next figure. The long, gliding steps of the slow Foxtrot give an impression of elegant ease, but control and balance are required to maintain that smooth flow.

During the Jazz Age of the '20s, the Foxtrot was sped up again. It acquired some of the jazzy hops and skips of the Charleston and became our present-day Quickstep. Of course, it didn't replace the slow Foxtrot, but joined it, a close cousin, and here is a dance that is just plain fun. The Quickstep is up, light, and airy, with lots of forward movement, running and locking steps, hops, and syncopated chasses. It is skipping down the sidewalk on a sunny, summer afternoon. Big open smile, humming the tune, carefree. The Foxtrot has been described as, "a nice girl with a naughty secret." There is smooth sophistication and confidence on the surface, but a little flirtatious mischief underneath. It's a stroll in the park but with some tension, a little spice. Some saucy flirtation is fitting, given the slightly bawdy beginnings with Harry Fox. But the Quickstep is all on the surface, nothing to hide, a big, high-speed party, jumping for joy. Mr. Alex Moore, one of the foremost teachers of English ballroom dance, has referred to the Quickstep as, "a dance that can never grow stale, a dance that is unquestionably the most attractive expression of rhythm the world has ever known."

## Some Quantification --

So the Foxtrot and Quickstep are both great fun, in their own individual ways, and they are popular rhythms, too. We looked at the last URDC Convention and tallied the phase V and VI dances offered for evening programming. If we combine the related Foxtrot and Quickstep, they outnumbered all others at 101 dances out of 394 total (26%). Waltz and Viennese Waltz followed at 88 (22%).



For a little broader picture, we did a search of the All-Over cue-sheet web site (URLs given below), which indexes over 7,000 cue sheets at all phase levels. Well, there are a lot of phase II and III two-steps and waltzes out there. You can see the details in the tally below.

So, in a country or square dance sort of environment, the two-step and waltz dominate, but as we get into more of a ballroom culture at the intermediate and advanced levels, we find more and more Foxtrots and the closely related Quicksteps. They are rich and sophisticated rhythms. Of course, individual tastes vary, but they sure feel good to us.

## NUMBER OF DANCES IN DIFFERENT RHYTHMS

RHYTHM	NUMBER OF CUE SHEETS	
	URDC list (see URL below), phase V, VI only	All Over list (see URL below), phase I - VI
SMOOTH		
Fox Trot	86	1143
Quickstep	15	234
Waltz	85	1428
V Waltz	3	na
Two-step	0	1905
Rhythm	10	50
Tango	28	235
	227 total Smooth	
LATIN		
Cha	27	809
Rumba	45	705

Jive	26	670
Bolero	22	228
West Coast Swing	19	90
Slow TS	8	72
Samba	3	32
Mambo	4	31
Paso Doble	8	23
Merengue	2	20
Salsa	1	6
Hustle	1	3
Lindy	1	2
	167 total Latin	

#### References --

- *Ballroom Dancing* by Alex Moore, Routledge Press, NY, 2002.
- *How To Dance Through Time, vol II, Dances of Ragtime Era: 1910-1920*  
<http://www.dancetimepublications.com/>
- <http://www.pamprow.com/URDC%20Dance%20selection%20main%20page.htm>
- <http://www.mixed-up.com/round/all-over/>

