



## Jive and Swing deserve a little care and precision, too

by Harold & Meredith Sears

Jive and Swing are often considered to be almost synonymous. Jive is faster and Swing is more easy-going, but we can casually lump them both with Lindy, Jitterbug — it's all Rock-and-Roll. If we make these mental connections, we may develop a loose, devil-may-care attitude that tempts us to flail around any old way and to step just any old where. But looseness like that is going to be uncomfortable because Jive music *is* often fast. Even though Jive is meant to be an "up" and fun rhythm, we can't afford to be anarchic about it. We still need some control and precision. If you take too big a step, or if you step in the wrong place, you won't have much time to "fix" it, and that whole little sequence will end up feeling forced, rushed, off balance, even frantic.

Consider the common **Change Places Right to Left** — 123a4; 1a2. We might be in closed position, man facing the wall with lead feet free. We both rock back to semi-closed position and then recover. Now we come to the two triples. How will we dance them: as a side chasse, or forward, back, in a cucaracha sort of way, or like a back hitch? We can do those triples randomly and just aim for where we need to be, but we likely won't be dancing together.

First, let's think about making our steps relatively small. Where a slower Swing Chasse might clearly be side/close, side, with two substantial, progressing steps, let's make our Jive Chasse more compact, more under our bodies, more of a step in place/step, small side. Jive is supposed to be mostly in place, not much travel, tidy, and efficient.



Second, let's be precise and focused in the progression and rotation that we do have. We are changing places from right to left. We have done our fallaway rock. The first triple for the man should be a diagonal forward

chasse, as he begins to move the woman in front of him and across the line of dance. She dances a side chasse, beginning to turn left-face. Just as she is about to take the third step of that first triple, she is facing partner and reverse line of dance. She takes the third step on her right foot and sharply turns right-face under lead hands. Now we have trail feet free. The second triple for the man is a forward chasse, as he follows the woman toward line and center. She dances a back chasse as she completes her underarm turn to face partner and reverse and wall.



Notice that the woman is doing almost all her right-face turn on a single step, the last step of the first triple. An advantage to this strategy is that it is compact and controlled. An alternative is to walk or "two step" in a circle, a much looser option. She is also following a general rule in Jive that most of our turns will be done on the lead foot. This is true whether the turn is to the left or right, or by the man or the woman. If we adopt this general habit, then our turns will be a little more automatic and comfortable.

A third thing we can do to keep our Jive compact and in control is to change some (or all) of the figures from triple (qqq&q; q&q) to single Jive (qq; s). If you think of Single Swing as a whole other rhythm, then this might feel like serious cheating, sort of like dancing a Cha as a Rumba. But if you can regard single, double, and triple Jive as slightly different styles of the same rhythm, then shifts among them become natural and comfortable. Our Change Places R to L becomes a rock, recover, and she steps side and spins on the first slow, and then steps back left on the second slow—a total of four steps.

Almost no matter how fast the music, careful footwork and compact chasses or single rhythm will tame it and not only give us clean and attractive form, but make it languid and comfortable, too.

