



## PLAYING WITH WALTZ TIMING - SPIN AND TWIST

By Harold and Meredith Sears

The timing of a waltz measure is one, two, three, right? With a nice strong downbeat: one, two, three. But many figures flow better, feel better, and look better when you depart - just a little - from the stated timing.

The standard timing of the Spin Turn is 123. In closed position usually facing reverse line of dance, the man begins left face upper-body rotation, he steps back on his left foot (L), toeing in a little to anticipate the turn, and he brings the lady forward on her right foot (R), between his feet. We pivot 1/2 to face line of dance and begin to rise through stretch in the leg and frame. On beat 2 he steps forward R (lady bk L) between the lady's feet, rising up into a hovering action onto the ball of the right foot as the lady brushes R to L, and continues the turn. This is the "spin" of the Spin Turn. On beat 3, he recovers side and back L (lady fwd R) to closed position. The standard figure turns a total of 5/8 and ends with the man facing diagonal line and wall. An Overturned Spin Turn, or simply Over Spin Turn, turns 1/4 more to face diagonal reverse and wall and can turn all the way to face reverse.

Now, what about that timing? The first step is a preparatory pivot into the spin - less important. The third step is the exit into the next figure - still less important. Of course, the core of the Spin Turn is the spin - step 2 - and here we could use a little more time to make something out of it and to show it off. So, let's stretch that beat 2. Spend more time there, on our trail feet. We are rising, with body rise, leg rise, *and* foot rise. We are pausing or hovering up there like an eagle on an updraft. And we are spinning smoothly. The lady is drawing her lead foot in to her balance point like a ballerina. We've got quite a display going here, a peacock spreading his plumes. Take the time to give the *full* performance.

Where do we get all the extra time for this "performance-art display"? Well, it's not a huge amount of time. We've been exaggerating a little in order to paint the picture. We only want one or two moments, and we get them from beats 1 and/or 3. If we dance step 1 just a little faster than we might otherwise, then we arrive at step 2 a little sooner. Take step 1 on beat 1 but turn it a little faster so you're ready to take step 2 before beat 2 strikes. That way, you are on your trail feet and you have not just "the rest of beat 2" but the whole of beat 2 to do your spin, your hovering action -- your display. Then out you come on beat 3.



You can also borrow from beat 3, instead of or in addition to borrowing from beat 1. If you are into your display and into your spin, and especially if you are overturning the spin to reverse and wall, then you might want to let it intrude into beat 3. The man definitely needs to control the amount of spin and the stretching of beat 2. He delays the taking of step 3 depending on the feeling in the music, depending on how you both react to that, on your balance, and depending on subsequent choreography, too. The lady allows him to stretch out this display by remaining on balance and by not even thinking of taking her third step until she feels him begin to take his. Again, all this is especially useful if you are dancing an Over Spin Turn. That figure can feel as though you have a long way to go. The idea of "stretching" beat 2 lets you simply ride the spin until you get where you want to be.

Let's put this into numbers (optional paragraph :-). If we wanted to dance a Spin Turn into a Box Finish, the timing on the cue sheet would probably be 123; 123. What we're suggesting here is that you might feel better with 1 ah spin &; 123; -- using the "ah" or the end of beat 1, the whole of beat 2, and even the first part of beat 3, up until the "&" of beat 3, all for the spin. The man steps L on beat 1, steps R on the last quarter of beat 1 and begins the spin (the "ah"), continues to spin through beat 2 and into the first half of beat 3, and only exits L on the second half of beat 3 (the "&"). You'd really want to soar to take all that time, but the point is that we *can* find a lot of extra time. Very often, it feels good to

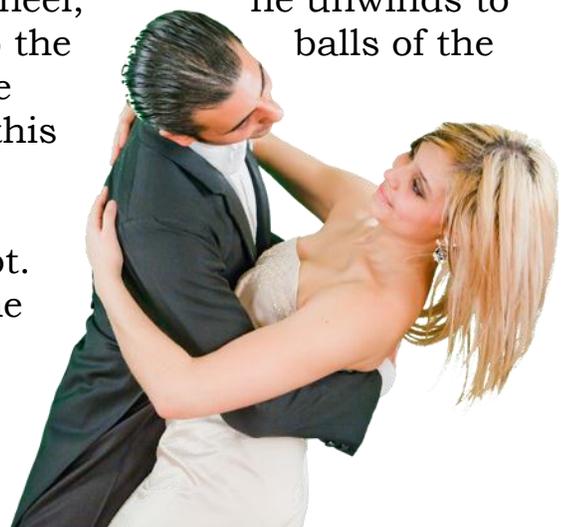


use at least some of it and *stretch* that beat. Sometimes, we are dealing with the *practical* matter of waiting for our partner to finish a step or an action, and sometimes we are *aesthetically* expressing a slight pause or feeling in the music.

In other ways, we like to feel free to depart from the "standard" timing of a figure. Continuing in the Spin Turn family, the **Spin and Twist** is a Spin Turn overturned into a Twist Turn. So, we are usually in closed position facing reverse line of dance with lead feet free. The man steps back commencing a

right-face pivot 1/2, and the lady steps forward R between his feet. He steps forward R between her feet continuing to turn, and she steps side and back L and draws R to L. On count 3, he steps side L turning to face diagonal reverse and wall, and she closes R to L. During this first measure, we are dancing an Over Spin Turn. Now the trail feet are free and we are ready for the Twist Turn in measure 2. The man crosses behind and unwinds. The lady runs right face, unwinding him (1&23). We usually end in closed position facing diagonal wall, wall, or even diagonal reverse and wall, depending on the choreography, having made a 1 5/8 to 1 7/8 total turn.

Let's look at this Twist Turn a little more closely. A Twist Turn really begins with upper body rotation to the right, flowing out of the Spin Turn. The man steps back on his right foot. The rotation gives the back step a crossing-behind component (we don't want a tight "hook"). Then, using pressure into the right toe and the left heel, he unwinds to a very neat side-by-side foot position, rises to the balls of the feet, and changes weight to the right foot. The count in waltz is 1/&. During the "1" half of this beat, he is evenly weighted on both feet and unwinding. Toward the end of the "&" half of the beat, he shifts weight fully to his right foot. The lady has stepped L/R to the outside of the man in a right-face arc. She



is on the balls of her feet. On beat 2, the man continues to turn on the ball of his right foot, and the lady steps forward L and turns with him. On beat 3, he steps side and back L, and she steps forward R between his feet to closed position, trail feet free again. Notice that there are two weight changes for the man and four for the lady.

That is our standard timing -- 1&23 -- but waltz syncopation is especially fun to play with. Try &123 for a noticeably different effect. Remember, this is the timing of the lady's "run." If she steps out with an "&," she is really using the last half beat of the previous measure, leaving the whole second measure for a more "waltzy," 1-2-3 unwind. Somewhat similarly, we often like to do waltz syncopation with 123& timing. Again, we get a stately 1-2-3 turn; then the exit step is almost an afterthought that shoots immediately into the next figure. I don't think we can recommend dancing the Twist Turn 12&3, because the "2" is just where we want to rise and maybe hover a bit before our exit, and we don't want to cut that short.

We've always been a little skeptical of those who say, "the music tells you what to do," but the music often *does* tell you when to do it and so helps you to choose among these syncopation options. And you do have the option. Don't feel that you have to dance every beat or every measure exactly the same or even exactly as written.

Finally, let's have a quick look at the **Spin and Double Twist**. In this figure, we dance a Spin and Twist overturned to face reverse and add a second Twist Turn. This would give us  $2 \frac{5}{8}$  to  $2 \frac{7}{8}$  total turn over three measures. The standard timing is 123; 1&23; 1&23. Those are the steps for the lady. The man steps 123; 1, -, 3; 1, -, 3. The hyphens here represent the "&2" during which he is unwinding with no weight change and she is running. But -- a problem inherent in this "Double Twist Turn" lies in the long side step with the man's left foot that overturns the first Twist Turn and prepares him to do the second Twist Turn. It can become an abrupt leap that disturbs the smooth flow of the waltz, but we can fix it by playing with that standard timing. Again, a Twist Turn for the man involves two weight changes. He crosses his right foot behind his left. She unwinds him. He steps side L on beat 3. The man can smooth out a Double Twist Turn by taking four weight changes, just as the lady does. On beat 1, cross the right foot behind left taking weight and step L as she begins to unwind you (1&). On beat 2, step forward R

between her feet and pivot right-face in a maneuvering action, and then step *small* side L to set up for the second Twist Turn. The count becomes 1&23; and the flow is so much smoother than the usual "cross/unwind, -, leap." Jim & Bonnie Bahr used this smoother, progressing version of the Double Twist Turn in their *Red River Waltz* and again in their *Our Love Melody*, where they specifically call the figure Spin and Double Twist With Pivot. It flows so well that we think even a **Spin and Triple Twist** would be comfortable.

Changing the man's steps from 1, -, 3; to 1&23; is certainly bolder than simply stretching a beat or moving an "&" from one beat to another, but it's okay. It can feel very good. If, sometime, you find yourself dancing a wheel 4 (12&3) as a wheel 6 (1&2&3&), don't apologize. It might express your feelings trippingly and be exactly right.

