



Rise, Fall, and the Foxtrot Three Step

by Harold & Meredith Sears

Foxtrot is one of the Smooth Rhythms, along with waltz, quickstep, and tango, but it is a particularly smooth rhythm, with its long steps, easy flow, and its gliding motion around the floor. One of the features of foxtrot that gives it this smooth look is early rise. We take our first step heel to toe, we straighten the leg, we even stretch a little in the torso (being careful not to lift our shoulders toward our ears). We have "foot rise" and "body rise" -- we are up at the end of the first step. We take the second step on the ball of the foot, staying up. The third step is on the ball, and we lower through the body and to the flat of the foot only at the end of step 3. We get up quickly, we soar like a bird, and we lower at the end, ready to do it again. The shape of foxtrot rise and fall is like a flat western mesa.



In contrast, waltz is less flat and more undulating. We *begin* to rise at the end of the first step, we *continue* to rise during step 2 and even into step 3, and then we lower at the end of step 3. Our rise is more gradual, more wave-like, with crests and troughs, a gentle up-and-down breathing. The shape of waltz rise and fall is more like a softly eroded ocean island.



So, waltz is something of a roller coaster, and foxtrot is more of a high traverse on skis. But the foxtrot Three Step is a little different. It consists of three forward steps (SQQ). In banjo or in closed position, the first step is forward L (lady bk R). The man steps heel to toe, as you would expect, and he can begin a little body rise, but the second step is forward R, also heel to toe (lady bk L). The figure begins with *two* heel leads. So, our foot rise and full rise is delayed until the end of the second step, and as usual, we lower at the end of step 3 -- forward L to closed position. The full rise in this figure lasts only about one beat.

Maybe this sounds like a really small and technical detail -- does it really matter whether we dance the second step with a heel lead or not? -- but if you don't, you can come over and overpower your lady. In a good closed position, with no side lead, no feathering, no contra-body shaping, if you dance heel/toe, to the toe of the second step, if you are up and driving forward, then she is pushed away, perhaps a bit to his right, and you end up out of position. If you stay down, you will move into her rather than over her, and you will stay beautifully together for that delayed rise.



Let's compare the Three Step to the Feather. To Feather from closed position, we step forward R (lady bk L), turning the body a little right-face (left side lead). The man steps heel to toe and rises to foxtrot soaring height. The second step is forward L on the *ball* of the foot. We can use this early rise, as we do in most other foxtrot figures (e.g., Telemarks, Weaves, Turns, Hovers), because we are not moving *into* our partner with the right foot. We are sliced, in banjo, with contra-body position. This shaping softens the power of the step. The third step is forward R across the left leg ending in banjo, toe to heel and lowering for the next figure.

A nice practice exercise is dancing the Three Step to closed position; Feather to banjo; Three Step to closed ; again, and again. The most important skill to work on in this exercise is the blending from closed position in the Three Step, with shoulders perpendicular to line; to a tight, contra-body banjo position in the Feather, with left-side lead and shoulders diagonal to line; back to closed position, and so on. But, at the same time, try alternately to use early rise in the Feather, late rise in the Three Step, and see if you don't feel more comfortable. This skill is not only useful to the man. Let the lady try the same late rise in the Back Three step and in the second measure of the Reverse Wave. Here, she is dancing forward L and then forward R in closed position, and two heel leads should feel smoother and less bumpy. Pick a dance at a level below where you usually learn -- phase IV or even phase III (where the cue in closed position might be "Forward Run Two"). Again, try two heel leads and late rise on the right foot. Does it feel better, more in control?

