

Whip Her Across

by Harold & Meredith Sears

The Whip, Cross Body, and Left Pass are three Latin figures in which the man gets to move the woman from one side of the partnership to the other. They are not used equally among the rhythms. The Whip is standard in Rumba and in Cha. The Cross Body is more widespread—standard in Rumba, Cha, Mambo, and Bolero. The Left Pass is standard only in Bolero. But they all move the woman from here to over there—from wall to center, from center back to the wall, maybe from line to reverse. As a couple, we turn up to 1/2.

If the Whip, Cross Body, and Left Pass all do about the same thing—“whip her across,”—what are the differences among them? We certainly don’t want to have three different names for only one dance figure.

Rumba

The **Whip** is rated at phase III, whereas the Cross Body and Left Pass are phase IV. One reason might be that we tend to dance the Whip farther from our partners, with more room to move easily. Often, we are in butterfly position. Let’s suppose he is facing the wall. The man steps back on his right foot, turning to the left, and the woman steps forward on her left, beginning to dance around his left side. This first step puts some distance between them. Often, he moves his right and her left arms through to urge her across (Whip “with arms”?). There is room to do that. His second step is forward left turning to face center, as the woman continues to move forward right and then turns 1/2 to face partner. Both then step side on the trail foot, now facing in their new direction in good butterfly position again. So there is a loose and “whippy” feel to a Whip that we don’t find in the other two figures.

It’s easy to think of a **Cross Body** as a Half Basic to a Whip. It is a two-measure figure in Rumba, Cha, and Mambo, but we shouldn’t be too impressed by that aspect of its definition. Some teachers will even cue “Half Basic to a Cross Body,” just as they would cue, “Half Basic to a Whip.” Perhaps what is more important in making the Cross Body a different figure and a different phase level is the fact that it is done in closed position. This feature makes it a little cozier, a little more sophisticated, a little less loose and whippy.



The first measure of the two-measure figure is a Half Basic with a little turn at the end for the man. The man dances forward left (woman back right), both recover, and then they step side, the man beginning to turn left. You can think of this as a preparation measure, and it does put you in a different position than you would likely be in prior to a Whip. Before a Whip, you would usually be apart from each other in butterfly position. Before the whip part of a Cross Body, you would be closer, in a closed L-position, with the man facing about line of dance and the woman facing center of hall. In the second measure, he steps back right continuing to turn, and she steps forward left between his feet, beginning to turn. He takes a small step forward left, and she steps forward right completing a 1/2 turn. He then steps side and forward right (woman side and back left) to end in closed position, man facing center. So, the man begins his left turn early, during the preparatory measure. This feature softens the Cross Body by spreading his turn over a little more time. More important, he leads the woman into him and then completes his turn with her. In the Whip, he leads her across in front of him, almost away from him, cracking the whip at arms length, so to speak.

It's easy to do a Cross Body more loosely, to dance the half-basic part in a way that separates the man from the woman and then to dance the whip part loose and whippy. But if we stay in closed position, then she will move to the other side more gently and with the man, and we will have a Cross Body instead of a Whip.

Bolero

In Bolero, the Cross Body is defined as a one-measure figure. It begins with the lead feet, and it begins with the slow side step that is typical of so many Bolero figures (slow, quick, quick; rather than quick, quick, slow in Rumba). One might almost suggest that we are taking the terminal side step from the Rumba figure and using it to begin the Bolero figure.

The man steps side and back left, beginning to turn left. The woman steps side and forward right across in front of the man. His second step is back right with a slipping action that keeps him close to his partner, and she steps forward left turning 1/2 left to face the man. He ends with a small step forward left toward partner (woman side right). Since Bolero figures begin with the slow side step (and with the "other" foot), they are going to feel very different from their Rumba counterparts, but notice how close and gentle this figure is. Stepping side and back with the lead foot carries the man into the woman's path, whereas stepping back with his trail foot in the Rumba Whip carries him away from her path. His second step is a small slipping action, which keeps him close to her as she dances through him. And his third step is into her—this is a together figure, not an apart one. It is a Cross Body, not a Whip.

Finally, the **Left Pass** is used only in Bolero and is really the most sophisticated of all three of these figures. We might begin in left open facing position, man facing the

wall. The man steps forward left to a contra sidecar position facing reverse and wall, and he lowers his left and her right hands to lead her to step forward right and turn 1/4 right-face. She turns her back to him, ending this first step in a partially wrapped tandem position. Notice that we are not beginning in closed position, as we do in the Rumba Cross Body, but with the first step, we get quite close. He has not stepped back away from her but forward into her. From this cozy, flirtatious position, the man steps back on his right with a slipping action to face line of dance, and the woman steps side and forward left with a strong left-face turn to face reverse and wall. Finally, he steps forward left turning left-face to face partner, and she steps back right. Where the Cross Body usually turns 1/2, the Left Pass only turns 3/8.

We have three figures here that move the woman from one side of the man to the other, but they are not different names for the same action. We can see a clear gradient of increasing gentleness and seductiveness. The Whip is playful and even a bit roughhouse, and the name, with its hard “p” sound and cultural resonances (40 lashes; crack that whip!), hints at a little sharpness or abruptness. The Cross Body is a name that is softer on the tongue and a figure that is danced closer and less like a carnival ride. And the Left Pass is the gentlest of all. Feel how the soft “f” and breathy “pass” stroke the tongue, like a caressing breeze. Feel how the woman turns into the man’s left arm, like an embrace, and then rolls softly across.

