

DAN AND SANDI'S  
A FEW NOTES ON FOXTROT

Foxtrot at the advanced level is a gliding dance intended to cover ground. It is like the swan floating on the lake. It looks so serene, gliding along with so little effort, yet, under the water, strong feet are working in powerful strokes to create the movement.

Many different adjectives are used to describe the fluid movement characteristic of the foxtrot: Elegant, lazy, unhurried, oily, gliding.

Foxtrot has two basic styles. The simplest form is social foxtrot (also called “crush dancing”) that is usually done on crowded dance floors, characterized by patterns made up of one or two walks and a side together, with little movement. Advanced foxtrot, called international or slow foxtrot, is characterized by fluid movement resulting from passing feet on almost all steps.

#### HISTORY:

Foxtrot is considered a strictly American creation, although it traces its lineage back to the “one step” in the Victorian era. Some say Vernon and Irene Castle created the dance, which was then popularized by Harry Fox, a vaudeville dancer born in Pomona, California, who did it in a New York stage show in 1914. “Harry’s Trot” used fast trotting steps to ragtime music.

Although most believe the dance was named for Harry Fox, other historians believe it was named for the equestrian gait of the Missouri Foxtrotter, a horse with a smooth trot unlike other breeds, due to the horse always having one foot on the ground as it strides.

Others believe it was named for the fox because the fox has an unusual gait among animals, moving with its feet under its body on a single track, similar to CBMP steps in foxtrot.

In its original form, the dance was fast. The American Society of Professors of Dancing almost immediately standardized the steps and replaced the “trot” with a gliding stride that would be less tiring. The faster version evolved in the 1920s into the Quickstep, which has kept the runs, chasses, hops and skips of Harry’s Trot.

#### TEMPO & TIMING:

Basic slow foxtrot timing is “*Slow, quick, quick*” in 4/4 timing, meaning there are usually three steps in four beats of music. The “slow” is equal to two beats of music and each “quick” is one beat. Today’s foxtrot moves at about 120 beats per minute, or 30 measures a minute.

#### DANCE POSITION:

Foxtrot is danced with the standard ballroom hold. You should think about balance, poise and topline. Your body weight must move to be over a supporting leg. Body weight is made up of four blocks: Your head, shoulders, ribcage and hips, which should be kept in alignment. Keep your knees relaxed—never locked. Arms should be held up with the muscles on the underside of the upper arm; shoulders should be rotated so they are down.

#### MOVEMENT:

Movement considers foot placement, alignment, sway, rotation, swing and rise and fall. Foxtrot depends on all of those actions to achieve its smooth, gliding look. Alignment is the diagonal on which the dance progresses, as in all rhythms.

#### FOOT PLACEMENT:

In foxtrot, you will be concerned about how to place your feet, not just where. The progressive, smooth flowing, elegance of foxtrot depends on the way the feet are used. Heel leads, while important in other dances to generate power, become imperative in foxtrot. You will “roll through your feet,” meaning a forward step begins with a heel lead and as the body moves forward, the weight will roll over the feet as you leave the stride on the tip of your shoe. Think that your feet are concave, shaped like a beachball. In you were stopped in mid-stride, the heel of the forward foot would be striking the ground as you have rolled to the toe of the foot you are leaving. This concept is what makes foxtrot one of the hardest dances to master. Lady stepping backwards will leave the heel of the standing foot while reaching back with the toe of the moving foot.

#### CBMP:

Steps in foxtrot often move with one side leading. This occurs when the foot and shoulder on the same side of the body move forward or backward at the same time. This generally is followed by a step in CBMP, or contra (contrary) body movement position. CBMP occurs when one foot moves forward or backward on the same track as the other foot, creating a rotation in the body. Steps ending in banjo and sidecar (such as wing) are usually in CBMP.

#### SWING, ROTATION & BODY SWAY:

Swing in foxtrot has the feel of a pendulum; your hips will swing ahead of your body. Sway is accomplished in many ways, but it is seldom the result of just moving your shoulders. When stretching one side of the body to create a sway, don't collapse the opposite side. Normal sway is the natural inclination of the body from the ankles upward and away from or toward the moving leg. This is used on nearly all figures that curve, wave or turn (except for spins). Sway can be *toward* the moving foot occasionally, as in a hover to semi-closed position.

Foxtrot uses rotation like a baseball pitcher's “wind up;” the body rotates around the spine, creating energy for the swing of the foxtrot stride.

#### RISE & FALL:

Foxtrot uses rise and fall but in a different way than waltz because foxtrot is danced in a more linear fashion than waltz. In waltz, a dancer is expected to close his feet at the end of most figures; in foxtrot, the feet are passing, so the rise is carried forward down line instead of straight up. In foxtrot, this rise and fall is called body flight.

The rise, for example, moving through a feather and three step is like going across a bridge over a small creek. Man will rise through his feet and ankles; rise & fall for Lady is more often through a stretch in the body (seldom through the feet). The action of rolling from heel to ball of foot in each step also causes a gentle rise and fall, beginning at the end of step 1 and continuing through to a gradual lowering at the end of step 3.