

THE DREADED FORWARD STEP

We utilize every chance we get to remind our students that the man's first step in most left turning figure in the "smooth" rhythms [Foxtrot, Quickstep, Tango & Waltz] is a FORWARD step and not a left turning step.

We believe it has something to do with the dancer's theory that the best way to complete a left turning figure is to take the shortest route to get to where the figure is supposed to end. Turning to the left on the first step gets the turn started earlier and the couple believes they have a better chance to make the proper amount of turn.

The problem is it takes away the progression of the figure. A left turning figure doesn't only turn left. If done properly it also progress toward the direction of dance instead of "screwing" the figure into a small spot on the dance floor. "Smooth"[Waltz, Foxtrot, etc] dancing is characterized by longer flowing steps than most of the other rhythms we dance.

We believe there are several reasons why this phenomenon occurs but probably the most logical reason is a result of the way we teach "smooth" basics to new dancers.

One of the first things we teach beginners is facing directions: LOD, RLOD, WALL & COH. We utilize these facing directions when we expose them to their first smooth rhythm at phase II & III Waltz. Most of the dances written at this level are choreographed using LOD, RLOD, WALL & COH. Left turns are more difficult to accomplish depending on where they begin & end if not started from a diagonal position, i.e. DLC vs. LOD.

One of the first figures we teach our new dancers is a Waltz LEFT TURNING BOX. Our Roundalab Phase manual describes the first measure of the LEFT TURNING BOX as "FWD TRN, SD, CL;" meaning we turn left on the first step. We believe this is the beginning of the problem. From then on and all through basics and even through phase III Waltz every left turning figure is taken with a left turning step first. As soon as the dancer hears the word "LEFT" the foot automatically turns to the left on the first step. It is now imprinted in the computer in our student's brains and will influence every left turning figure from then on.

Now when our dancers are ready to begin working at phase IV Waltz & Foxtrot we begin to teach them that we will now use diagonals: DCL, DLW, DRW & DRC. Most of the dances written at phase IV and above use DCL, DLW, DRW & DRC [DIAGONALS] in their facing directions so we make this directional change in our teaching presentation.

We also teach our students that the first step for the man for any left turning figure, i.e. LEFT or REVERSE TURN, TELEMARK, DOUBLE REVERSE, etc. is a FORWARD step commencing ONLY an UPPER BODY left turn at the end of the step. What happens? With most dancers nothing. They continue to react as they have for the last year or two and turn left on the first step. This is when we realize how deeply engrained turning the foot on left turns has become.

This problem of turning on the first step rather than stepping forward applies to many figures that begin with a back step also and "bleeds" over into other rhythms, i.e. "STEP & TURN" in Latin's. This problem also occurs on some right or natural turning figures but our concentration is on Left turning figures here.

[The Dreaded Forward Step continued](#)

We believe that one of the best ways to combat this situation is to change the way we teach "SMOOTH" basics:

What if we began teaching our students about DIAGONALS as soon as they are exposed to any smooth rhythm [generally Waltz] instead of waiting till they get to phase IV?

What if we taught them about the FORWARD step when making left turns right from the beginning instead of waiting till they get to phase IV?

What if we taught the LEFT TURNING BOX as: " FWD, SD TRN, CL;" meaning the first step is a straight FORWARD step, and the $\frac{1}{4}$ turn took place as we took the second [SIDE] step? It doesn't change the figure. It just changes where the turn occurs. This small adjustment to the LEFT TURNING BOX and concentrated effort on ensuring the first step is forward on all other left turning figures could instill a lifelong change in how our students approach any left turning figure from then on. It would be much easier to teach them this philosophy at the beginning of their training before they get into a habit that is very difficult to change later on.

[The Dreaded Forward Step article by Dom & Joan Filardo](#)