

Waltz

The Contra Waltz (Freeform Waltz), included in most contra dance evenings, uses both open and closed positions, and incorporates moves from other dances such as swing, tango, and salsa. The dancers progress around the dance floor with a waltz step, but with no constraints on what moves they can use.

There is no goal. Dancing is better when you feel connected with your partner and the music, when you enjoy the improvisation and laugh and let go of any rough spots, and are sensitive to each other's experience and the room around you. No points for extra twirls or complicated moves. Some of the most enjoyable dances have high connection and low complexity.

Music

Usually four repeating 8-measure structures in 3/4 time, AABB, with a strong accent on the first beat at a fast walking tempo. For dancing, counting in 6-step phrases, each AA and BB half has 8 phrases.

Formation

Any number of couples scattered about the room, individually progressing counterclockwise.

Dance

The basic is 6 steps (starting lead L, follow R) repeated 16 times. Each step is in time with the music. The steps on the first and fourth beat are longer traveling steps.

Traditionally, "lead"=male, "follow"=female.

Of course, anyone can dance either position.

References

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waltz

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waltz_%28music%29

wa64.com/Waltz.html

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StatAcumen.com/dance

Frame

In closed (ballroom) position, shoulders are nearly parallel to each other, feet are slightly offset (your right foot is between partner's feet). Lead's right hand is flat on follower's back at shoulder blade, Follow's left hand is ALSO on the lead's right shoulder blade supporting herself. Lead's right arm and follow's left arm are touching and connected along their length. Lead's left hand & follower's right hand are connected (not a grip) for balance and signal. Goal is to match & balance the weight between the 2 partners.

Posture is tall but not erect, legs are slightly bent for balance and movement.

Communication, body language

In this order: frame, shoulder hand, free hand.

1. **Torso** rotation provides direction (rather than steering by pulling or pushing with arms, turn torso as an invitation to come this way or that).
2. **Shoulder hand** provides rotational cues. Follower's left hand should take some of her weight.
3. **Free hand** provides some turn cues, but otherwise does very little. (Many moves can be done with this hand at your side.)

Leading and following

A cooperative, responsible partnership initiates and responds (not active/passive) and is in balance.

Lead:

- clear inviting cues
- timely (leads each move one beat ahead)
- aware (of music, traffic, partner)
- flexible (when partner misinterprets or the unexpected happens)

Follow:

- alert
- aware
- anticipating (not assuming)
- appreciate the dance the lead creates for you

Basic

Waltz in place, starting on first foot. Do not travel forward. Think of this as a 6-beat move, so that when you initiate something new it will be on beat 1. This is your emergency "we're crowded" move.

Waltz (traveling on each beat) in line of direction, lead facing forward. Start on first foot. Stay on balls of feet. Step on each beat in even time with the music. For step distance, think long-short-short, long-short-short. This as a 6-beat move. You will initiate a new move on your first foot.

Turning waltz begins on first foot

- 123 - lead turns 180 degrees. Left foot takes long step directly past partner on beat 1. Second foot finishes the turn with the third step continuing a pivot in place.
- 456 - follow takes a long step around lead, finishes turn on second step, and pivots on third step to complete.
 - This cw turn is easier than ccw turn.
 - Try in barrel hold first (keeps frame more solid, goal is to keep frame this solid in ballroom position, too!)
 - From non-turning waltz, initiate by moving follower slightly to side on previous beat 6.
 - Mutual commitment to complete turn, not active/passive; both partners cooperate.
 - Follower must carry her weight!

Variations

Twirls from closed position

Clockwise

- 123 - lead raises left hand to initiate twirl, bring hand down to catch in closed position.
- 456 - return to closed position.

Lead can leave hand up for two twirls; use your judgment! Goal is to reconnect and be ready to move forward together on beat 1.

Counterclockwise

456 - lead brings left hand across in front to initiate twirl. Keep lead's hand at shoulder level until follower is moving in counterclockwise direction. Catch partner in closed position. Be sure to allow her left elbow to move past your right arm before you re-establish connection.

Cuddle -- joined uncrossed hands

In and out of cuddle from closed position

6-beats into cuddle:

- 123 - step back and join hands straight across
- 456 - lead brings left hand across & up between self and partner to turn follower ccw as she turns to end hip-to-hip in cuddle position (both facing line of direction).

3-beats into cuddle:

- 456-lead brings left hand across & up between self and partner to turn follower ccw, catching follower's left hand as she turns to end in cuddle.

6-beats out of cuddle:

- 123 - lead lifts left hand to initiate cw twirl 1/2 for follower to face.
- 456 - step together to closed position.

6-beats out of cuddle with turn:

- 123 - lead lifts left hand to initiate cw twirl 1 1/2x for follower.
- 456 - Lead's right hand is used to help indicate direction of twirl, then lets go.
- continue - Catch follower in closed position (nice place for turning waltz or pivots).

Switch sides into reverse cuddle

- 123 - lead lifts left hand to initiate cw turn 1/2 to face each other
- 456 - lead lifts right hand to continue cw turn 1/2 to end in cuddle (follower on the left)

Illusions

- 123 - lead steps across in front of follower to initiate 360 degree pivot for both lead and follower, end facing line of direction again, with hands at waist, but follower will be on lead's left side.
 - Be careful to keep hands at waist level at all points, so follower will not get stray signal to twirl. Keep hands close to her waist and stay close. Follower takes 3 very small steps in place on beats 123 as she pivots.
- 456 - lead slides follower back to right side, moving in front of lead. Lead moves behind follower to the left.
 - Follower must keep connection in her arms in order to match weight and respond to lead. Don't let go of either hand!

Twirl with lead rotation to promenade or cape

- Start in reverse cuddle position (follow on left)
- 123 - lead initiates counterclockwise twirl for follower by releasing his right hand and unwinding her with his left hand. Lead rotates counterclockwise with her.
 - At the half-way point, lead is facing backwards and the follower is facing forwards.
- 456 - lead **passes her right hand** into his right hand as they complete the turn, ending to both face line of direction, follower on lead's right, left hands joined in front, right hands joined at follower's waist (for promenade) or at shoulder (for cape).
 - Lead turns once around, follower turns twice around.

Twirl behind back to promenade or cape

Similar to previous move

- Start in reverse cuddle position (follow on left)
- 123 - lead initiates counterclockwise twirl for follower by releasing his right hand and unwinding her with his left hand. Lead continues facing line of direction, stepping forward and left so follow is behind him.
- 456 - lead passes her right hand into his right hand behind his back. Lead steps backward as follow completes the turn, ending to both face line of direction, follower on lead's right, left hands joined in front, right hands joined at follower's waist (for promenade) or at shoulder (for cape).
 - Lead does not turn, follower turns twice around. Follow must keep turning.
 - Sometimes Erik tells his partner "spin twice" before initiating this move.

Rotation, wind-up and unwind

From either side, both turn 1x in same direction.

- 123 - Lead releases front hand to unwind follow with connected hand in back. As she unwinds, he spins to wind himself up,
- 456 - catching the free hand at their close hips. (now lead is cuddled by follow, to undo ...)
- 123 - lead initiates a 1x turn by follow by passing front hand between them and over her head,
- 456 - catching the free hand so she is back in cuddle.

Reverse butterfly

- 123 - release front hand to unwind follow, pushing connected hand forward (face out, don't make eye contact)
- 456 - from fully facing-out position, bring connected hand back to fully face each other
- 123 - touch palms of free hands, pushing off to face out
- 456 - come back to face in again
- Wind back up
- 123 - instead of touching palms of free hand, lead uses a "toss the frisbee" motion to initiate a 1x turn for the follow to wind back up into cuddle.
- 456 - take free hand in front to close cuddle.

Laces

- 123 - Lead releases back hand, slides it along follow's back, catching it again at her close hip.
- 456 - Lead raises the hand just caught and walks forward under it while moving to follow's other side.
 - Now follow has lead in cuddle.
- 123 - Lead lets go of his back hand, follow slides it along his back to reconnect at waist level on lead's close hip.
- 456 - Lead raises the hand just caught and follow walks forward under it while moving to lead's other side.
- Repeat.

Works best if there is plenty of forward travel as you do this. Both face line of direction throughout. It also helps to hold onto hands as much as possible and reconnect as soon as possible. May help follower if lead holds her on left side for several measures before doing second half of move.

Laces, extra twirl

- During second 456 above, lead uses the caught hand to initiate a 1x ccw twirl to cross to other side of lead. During twirl, lead releases front hand and catches that hand to end in cuddle.
- To help catch the hand, it is easier if you make contact with her upper arm and slide down.

References

wa64.com/Waltz.html

Cape -- joined crossed hands

In and out of cape from closed position

3 beats into cape

- 456 - lead puts follow's right hand into his right at shoulder level as she turns 1/2 cw to face line of direction, connect left hands.
 - Keep hands at shoulder level so no twirl!

6 beats into cape with twirl

- 456123 - lead ccw 1-1/2 twirl. As follower comes around, lower left hand and switch her right hand to your right hand to catch in cape position.
 - Takes 6 beats to complete starting on 4, so your next step forward will be on beat 4.

3 beats out of cape

- 456 - lead raises left hand and guides follower to move in front of lead while doing cw twirl 1/2x.
- Lead can guide follow's left hand to his shoulder.

6 beats out of cape with twirl

- 123456 - lead raises left hand and guides follower to move in front of lead while doing cw twirl 1-1/2x. Catch follower in closed position.

Twirl sequence cw

key: s1 = six counts 1, this is an 8 measure sequence

- s1 - waltz forward
- s2 - follow ccw 1-1/2 into cape, lead must put follow's **right hand** into his right hand.
- s3 - waltz forward
- s4 - lead lifts left hand to guide follow cw around behind to his left side. Lead's right hand stays at shoulder level (or moves to waist level behind his back - chicken wing). Don't let go of either hand.
- s5 - waltz forward
- s6 - reverse promenade turn cw, follow walking forward, lead backward
- s7 - waltz forward
- s8 - lead uses left hand to guide follower in clockwise turn 1-1/2 into closed position. Can drop follower's hand onto lead's shoulder. (can go into waltz turn)

Substitution: both twirl to left (from chicken wing)

- s6 - lead guides follower with left hand to do ccw twirl in place. As soon as she starts, lead turns left (counterclockwise) under own arm (1x in place). Follower catches lead's right hand behind lead's back. (Better if not traveling.) Follow remains on lead's left side throughout move.

Slingshot into cape and back into closed position

- 123 - lead turns follow cw under left arm around to the right
- 456 - lead switches hands (puts follow's right hand in lead's right hand) and leads follower behind to his left side (feels like slingshot).
 - Lead faces line of direction this whole time.
 - Lead keeps right hand palm forward, fingers up, shoulder level. Left hands joined in front, lead's palm forward, fingers up, shoulder level.
- 1-6 - reverse courtesy turn 1x
- s7 and s8 above

Chicken wing zinger around back into cape

- 123 - waltz
- 456 - gently place follow's right hand behind her back in "chicken wing" position, and hold with lead's right hand.
- 1-6 - with right hand, lead twirls follow cw 1-1/2
- As follower comes around, lead offers his left hand at his left shoulder.
- 1-6 - promenade turn 1x
- 1-6 - with left hand twirl follow cw 1-1/2, catch in cape with right hand

Illusions

(similar to illusions in cuddle)

Scoop sequence

- s1 - 456 - pass right hand to cape
- s2 - waltz forward
- s3 - guide follow cw behind to left side
- s4 - left hand twirl follow cw 2x, by left hand high for 1x, then 1x low to scoop into left-side promenade position
- s5 - waltz forward
- s6 - right hand twirl follow ccw 2x (1x high, 1x low), while lead turns to left to keep her in front of him, and scoop into right-side promenade
- s7 - waltz forward
- s8 - left-hand lead follow twirl cw 1-1/2 into
- s9 - waltz turn

Twirls passing across

best done while traveling down the floor
with hands

- 1-6 - with left hand, twirl follow cw 1x from left to right in front of lead to end in cape on left side of lead.

reverse from follow in cape on left

- 1-6 - with right hand, twirl follow ccw 1x from right to left in front of lead to end in cape on right side of lead.

without hands

- same, but start leading turn and let go and catch left hand on left side. Almost like a hand-off at shoulder level. Lead, watch follow's hands closely to catch them quickly to keep control.
- return by reverse

Chicago move (12 beats)

- 1 - step forward as usual, but with a little more "urgency"
- 23 - both pivot cw 1/2 to have back to line of direction.
- 4 - 1/2 switchback, send follow forward (against line of direction)
- 56 - bring her back to lead's right side.
 - This has a bit of a "rubber band" feel to it.
 - Lead keeps his back to line of direction; hands remain at shoulder level.
- 123 - both pivot cw 1/2 to face line of direction.
- 456 - 1/2 switchback, again

References

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Skaters -- joined crossed hands

Transitions

From cape to skaters, 1x twirl

- 123 - without letting go of either hand, lead raises left hand and guides follower in cw twirl 1x.
 - End with hands in front, both facing line of direction, joined left hands above joined right hands.

From cape to skaters, 2x twirl

- 1-6 - with right hand, lead twirls follow cw 2x, once high and once low, and joins left hand in skaters.

From closed position to skaters, chicken wing

- 456 - gently place follow's right hand behind her back in "chicken wing" position, and hold with lead's right hand.
- 1-6 - with right hand twirl follow cw 1-1/2, once high then low to catch in skaters' with left hands above right hands in front.

From skaters to closed position

- 1-6 - with left hand twirl follow cw 1-1/2, placing left hand on lead's right shoulder to close.
or, when follow is on left side of lead
- 456 - initiate free twirl 1x for follower, catching in closed position.

Single or double skater to promenade

(like whoosh but catch and keep follow on lead's right side without a couple rotation.)

Switch sides into reverse cape

Follow twirls 2x to switch sides

- 1-6 - right hand stays low and initiates pressure pulling follow across to twirl, raising arms in middle of first twirl, and lowering arms at end of second twirl with follow on left side.
 - Both hands are connected throughout.
- 1-6 - reverse to send follow from left to right

Single whoosh

- 1 - initiate twirl ccw 1x by pulling right hand across, and keep it at hip level for entire move.
- 2 - raise left hand to twirl follow under
- 3 - catch in promenade position on lead's right side
 - during this sequence, as follow comes across in front, couple rotates ccw together about 1/4
 - Lead takes purposeful steps backwards
- 456 - scoop follow ccw 3/4 to face line of direction using momentum from twirl.
 - both hands stay connected through this move

Double whoosh

(Like single whoosh, but follow twirls twice before promenade position and couple rotation.)

- 1-6 - double twirl
- 1-3 - promenade rotation

From promenade to closed, both twirl

- 123 - lead initiates an in-place twirl cw 2x for follow by letting go of follow's hands, placing his left hand on the back of her left shoulder and his right hand on the front of her hip, then gently start her twirling in place.
- 456 - as the follow is completing her first rotation, the lead initiates his own twirl cw 1x towards follow.
- 1-6 - catch in closed position and waltz turn

References

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