

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.

Musical Phrasing

Music is typically two 3-beat 8-measure phrases in 3/4 time each repeated, AABB, with a strong accent on the first beat at a fast walking tempo.

Aim to **match choreographic phrasing to the music**, such as:

- A1 – 8-measure figure
- A2 – symmetric 8-measure figure
- B1 – new 8-measure figure
- B2 – big finish 8-measure figure, end with phrase

Waltz musical structure for dance phrasing



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, Wayne Albright and Gaye Fifer
Revised June 2012 by Erik Erhardt
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, Follower's left hand is ALSO on the lead's right shoulder blade supporting herself. Lead's right arm and follower'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

Dancing with many partners – the fastest way to learn!

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.

Parallels and cross step

Partners zigzag together

- lead stepping across in front (left foot moving to right)
- follow stepping across behind (parallels) or in front (cross step)

Idea: Waltz has a “left-2-3, right-5-6” feel (for the lead). Because of the foot-crossing nature of parallels and cross step, *getting in and out of parallels means moving twice in one direction* (while keeping same footing), such as gent’s footing:
“left-2-3, right-5-6, right-direction (left foot across)-1-2”

Parallels

Into parallels, basic

- 1,2,3 – waltz forward
- 4 – waltz forward
- 5 – individually **pivot** right 45-degree diagonal, position follower on left hip
- 6 – step in place and **prepare** for next step
- 1-6 – parallels

Parallels zigzag step

Diagonal, pivot, prepare, ...

- 1 – **long diagonal** step, 45 degrees from line of direction towards “outside” of room
- 2 – bring feet together, individually **pivot** left 90 degrees
- 3 – step in place and **prepare** for next step
- 4 – **long diagonal** step, 45 degrees from line of direction towards “inside” of room
- 5 – bring feet together, individually **pivot** right 90 deg.
- 6 – step in place and **prepare** for next step

Out of parallels, basic

- 1,2,3 – parallels
- 4 – parallels on left diagonal
- 5 – square torsos to each other (instead of full 90 degree pivot), putting attention and motion toward open hand (gent left, lady right)
- 6 – step in place, prepare to waltz normally, continuing motion towards gent’s left, lady’s right
- 1-6 – waltz

References

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Out of parallels, with turn

Pause on first measure

- 1 – long diagonal step
- 2 – hold partner in position, don’t turn
- 3 – raise open hand and put attention to the arch
- 4,5,6 – follower does outside (clockwise) turn to closed position, lead signals with right hand on back, and can help her around with his left hand, have weight ready to lead on first foot.

Pause by rocking in place

- 1 – long diagonal step
- 2,3 – hold in place
- 4 – gent steps back
- 5,6 – hold in place
- 1-6 – continue parallels

Can be done on either side

Continue in the same direction

The zigzag is 1 measure on each side, but any odd number of times on each side before the pivot will work

Try: 1 pivot, 1 pivot, 3 forward then pivot, repeat

Try: 2 forward, 1 back then pivot

Good practice for leading and following

Switchback (reverse illusions)

Lively, active, rotating turn together

- 1 – long diagonal step
- 2,3 – gent steps back then left, shifting lady from his left to right hip
- 4 – step cw around each other using momentum
- 5,6 – pivot and prepare for next step

This is one fluid motion requiring strong intension to get all the way around

This cannot be done on the other side.

Reverse rotation with flip

- 1 – long diagonal step, first foot
- 2,3 – hold in place, keep hip-to-hip position, reverse lady’s momentum
- 4-6,1 – rotate together 1X, gent leading lady to walk forward as he also walks forward
- 2,3 – “flip” pivot and prepare for next step
- 4-6 – parallels on second foot

Can be done on either side

Cross step

Into cross step, basic, mirror

- 1 – waltz **step**
- 2 – **open frame** toward open hand (gent's left) so closed hips are together
- 3 – step in place and **prepare** for next step
- 4 – both step across in front between each other, mirroring the other's step
- 5 – bring feet together, individually **pivot** so open hips are together
- 6 – step in place and **prepare** to step across with opposite foot

Out of cross step, basic

- 4 – step across in front
- 5 – **square frames** to each other, gent gives firm signal with right arm that next step will be towards open hand
- 6 – step in place and **prepare** to step to the side

Lasso with twirl into parallels

- 1-3 – cross step
- 4-6 – gent raises open hand and walks under while leading lady behind his right shoulder
- 1 – continue bring lady around in front
- 2-4 – initiate lady to outside twirl cw
- 5-6 – end in closed position, pivot to prepare to parallels

From parallels to cross step

Dance parallels

- 4-6 – right hips together in parallels, pause and rock in place
- 1-3 – gent steps back, leading lady to open to free hand
- 4-6 – lady cross steps, gent stepping forward
- 1-3 – lady cross steps, gent either pivoting to mirror, or keeping footwork of rocking parallels

Double twirl, butterfly, cross step

Cross step

- 1-3 – lead lady in inside ccw turn
- 4-6 – a second turn same direction
- 1-3 – use outside connected hand to lead back into a butterfly, close
- 4-6 – continue cross step

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, lead on left, follower on right).

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 and around to the other side of follower to complete a 360 degree pivot for both lead and follower, end facing line of direction, keeping hands at waist, follower now 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 to right side with a bulging motion, while 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 begins walking counterclockwise from follower's right to her left.
 - 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.
 - Lead can suggest to follower to "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.

Rotation works well with "Laces"

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 an extra measure before doing second half of move.

Laces works well with "Rotation"

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

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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)

- 123 – lead steps across in front and around to the other side of follower to complete a 360 degree pivot for both lead and follower, end facing line of direction, keeping hands at waist, follower now 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 to right side with a bulging motion, while 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!

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 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

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

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Rotary outside turn variations

Basic outside turn (2-bar)

- 1-3 rotary waltz, half turn, over-rotated so follow ends in outside lane
 - and prepare by firming frame and raising free hand a little
- 4-6 outside turn for the follow (follow turns cw)
 - Lead draws a circle around follow's head with free hand to turn her with 3 pivot steps, while
 - Lead walks with purpose on inside lane to get a little ahead of follow and catches her
- 1-6 close and waltz

Basic outside free spin (2-bar)

- 1-3 rotary waltz, half turn, over-rotated so follow ends in outside lane
- 4-6 outside free spin for the follow (follow turns cw)
 - Lead pushes gently with left hand and rotates follow's torso with his right as follow free spins cw with small pivot steps, while
 - Lead walks with purpose on inside lane to get a little ahead of follow and catches her
- 1-6 close and waltz

Lasso with back-handed assist (4-bar)

- 1-3 rotary waltz, half turn
- 4 start outside turn for the follow (follow turns cw)
- 5-6 lead slips back of R hand on follow's upper back and uses R arm like a lever and leads her cw walking around him (lasso) with joined hand over his head
- 1-4 follow continue walking around in front of lead
- 5-6 lead brings high arm down between them toward LOD to turn follow into closed position
- 1-6 waltz

Palm-to-palm outside turn sequence (8-bar sequence)

- 1-6 rotary waltz
- 1-3 rotary waltz, half turn, over-rotated so follow ends in outside lane
 - and prepare by raising free hand a little (lead left, follow right)
- 4-6 outside turn for the follow (follow turns cw)
 - Lead draws a circle around follow's head with free hand to turn her, while
 - Lead walks with purpose on inside lane to keep up with follow
- 1-3 Both face LOD, Lead on inside lane
 - Release hands and Lead's R hand catches follow's L hand
 - Bring joined hands forward as both walk, with Follow's back to Lead on count 3
- 4-6 Follow back free spin ccw to end facing back RLOD in outside lane (Lead walking forward LOD)
- 1-3 Right hands palm-to-palm, Lead braces his R hand into Follow's R hand as she faces him RLOD walking backwards after her free spin
 - count 2 stops her CCW rotation
 - count 3 initiates her CW rotation
- 4-6 Follow's forward free spin cw, with low hand push-off and release
- 1-6 catch with lead backing in front of follow, and waltz

Rotary inside turn variations

Inside turn, outside turn pivaloop sequence (6-bar sequence)

- 1-6 rotary waltz
- 1-3 rotary waltz, half turn
- 4-6 walking, lead facing LOD, follow backing up
- 1-3 Follow inside turn to open position
 - 1 Lead releases R arm with a forward push, Follow rotates ccw
 - 2-3 Lead's L hand comes into frame to rotate follow ccw
 - 1-3 Follow is pivoting back R, forward L, back R traveling LOD
- 4-6 Follow finishes turning while traveling forward LOD in the inside lane, Lead walking forward
- 1-3 Follow's first outside turn
 - 1 Lead lowers joined hand, letting follow's R arm be fairly straight
 - 2-3 Lead circles follow's head
 - 1-3 Follow is pivoting forward R, back L, forward R traveling LOD
 - Follow travels diagonally LOD toward outside lane while Lead moves himself into inside lane.
- 4-6 Follow's cw free spin
 - 4 Lead lowers joined hand early to lead a free spin
 - Follow takes small pivoting steps back L, forward R, back L
 - Lead passes her by in the inside lane, ready to catch
- 1-6 waltz

References

Richard Powers, Mile High Waltz Weekend, Boulder, CO Aug 2-5, 2013
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