

## **LET'S GET 'EM DANCING**

*(using some non-traditional methods)*

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"Tradition," according to Webster's dictionary is the handing down of information and customs by word of mouth, and also an inherited pattern of thought or social custom. So something "non-traditional" would be just the opposite of that; doing something that is just a little different from the norm, from the way "we always did/do it."

In teaching, no matter what subject, there are various methods, some traditional, and some non-traditional. Often new and non-traditional methods are thought up and tried, then either cast aside if shown to be not as good, or continued if proven worthy. One method of teaching 2-step figures is the "7-5-3 method" which we will discuss later on in this article. One fairly new method of teaching round dancing is using the rhythm "Cha-Cha" as an introduction, and we would first like to explore some of the possibilities using that method.

### ***Cha-cha-cha***

Let's stop and think for a minute; what is the purpose of an "open house" or even the first few nights of a beginners' class? We can never teach our dancers all we would like to in the first few times we have them in a class. If we think about it, the real purpose is to get them to come back to our classes, to the next lesson. If they don't come back, we can't teach them! We need to attract new dancers and as soon as possible give them the feeling that they are dancing. Most people have some sort of natural rhythm and enjoy listening to and moving to music. If we are to be successful we need to take that characteristic, magnify and build on it, to our, and their, best interest.

Cha-cha is one rhythm that has a strong beat, and is also a rhythm that most people are at least familiar with. If you play cha-cha music, most people have no problem hearing "1,2, cha-cha-cha" and then walking to that beat. In contrast, if you would put on 2-step music, people often do have trouble doing the traditional 2-step figure of "step, close, step".

### ***Walk and run***

So using cha, just how can you get your people dancing? In cha-cha, you can start with a method shown to us by Bill and Carol Goss - "walk, walk, run, run, walk". First explain to the dancers that dance steps are made up of walks and runs, then put on music with a strong one-count beat and just have them walk to the beat. You can do this in a big circle, everyone following their partner, or you can have them walk next to their partner, men on the inside, inside hands joined. They will usually naturally walk LOD, especially if you have square dancers. If they don't know in which direction to walk, put them in a big circle and ask them to turn a quarter to their right, or to walk

counterclockwise. But for some reason, if people walk in a circle, they normally move counterclockwise.

Now, without "teaching" them a thing, they have "learned" LOD and open position. Next, in the same manner, you can have them "run" to the same music and then walk again, and run again. This time you can say (while they are already in that position), "in OP/LOD, starting with the man's left, lady's right, the lead foot, we will walk." So now you are "teaching" them lead foot at the same time. The natural step to follow will be a combination of walks & runs. At first cue a series of 4 walks/8 runs a few times. Then use the combination, "walk, walk, run, run, walk". You can put on some good 5-count music and let them do that combination to the music. Now they can dance this combination again, but instead of counting with them using the words, "walk, walk, run, run, walk", use "1,2, cha, cha, cha". After a few times you can tell them that they have just danced cha-cha. Dancers who have learned this way have always expressed surprise and excitement when we have done this. And these few figures usually take only about 15 minutes to teach.

You can continue by teaching a circle cha, having them go to butterfly. You should show the position correctly, and say how their arms and hands should be (for their own comfort), but don't dwell too much on "styling" at this point. Then they can do a circle cha to butterfly. You can show how they can dance a "circle cha" to OP, "walk & a cha", and hash-cue those figures a few times. By now, without much effort, they have also learned butterfly position.

From here you may go on with some other phase III cha figures such as a fenceline. Then teach, for instance, a "fenceline to OP, walk & a cha", and you can go on with teaching a NYer, also using the combinations with a fenceline, and finally a crabwalk. As you have probably noticed, we have concentrated here on the "thru" figure family, and also mostly figures where they are holding hands. (While a spot turn is also a thru figure, it is best not to teach it yet; it is more difficult since the dancers are not holding onto a partner, and also have to make a full turn). Now you can add a cucaracha and then a basic, and from there a shoulder to shoulder.

This method has been used with as few as 1 couple, and in groups of more than 200 couples with the experience that the dancers immediately have the feeling that they are really dancing cha-cha! And with these figures you can easily hash cue to various pieces of cha-cha music. If they enjoy themselves, and feel like they are dancing, they will come back for more. And only if they come back for more can we continue to teach them anything else!

### ***Two-step***

OK, so cha goes well, but now, especially if your dancers are also square dancers and therefore will dance at combination square/round dance events, they will need to know basic 2-step. How can you use their knowledge of cha-cha to teach them 2-step, and is this a good way to get them to that point? One thing to remember in teaching, is that you always teach from the known to the unknown.

First of all, they are already dancing, and therefore having fun within their own group. Also, in the little bit of time you have spent on cha-cha, they also normally wouldn't be ready to go out and dance somewhere else. But if you have spent, let's say the first 3 weeks on cha-cha, by now they feel pretty comfortable with phase III cha, and can already dance a number of dances to cues! So they are already ahead of the "learning curve". But back to 2-step.

If you started your dancers using cha-cha, you can use this rhythm to teach 2-step in the opposite manner that some leaders use 2-step to teach cha. Your dancers already know "walk 2 and & 2-step", circle away 2 & a 2-step" and of course circle together, but as a cha-cha figure. To teach a forward 2-step you can have your dancers dance a "walk 2, cha-cha-cha" a few times. This way they have started with opposite feet, which they are already used to doing in cha-cha. Then let them just dance "cha-cha-cha" 2x, and they pretty much have the action of the 2-step. From there, if you want, you can work on an actual closing step. We know that there are some instructors that feel this is important, and some that do not. Arguing that point is not our objective here. We do try to remember that our main objective is to get our people dancing, but also dancing correctly. You will have to find your own balance.

One advantage in first teaching cha is that even while you are teaching 2-step you can still cue cha-cha, and your dancers continue dancing. They are also more used to changing rhythms, so probably won't have as much trouble in our 2-step dances which change quite frequently in quicks and slows. But there are more figures than the direct 2-step figure in the 2-step rhythm. To teach those figures, another method is useful. This is called the "7-5-3 method".

### ***"7-5-3"***

The 2-step rhythm is probably one of the most difficult rhythms to teach beginners, but one must learn it in order to dance our phase I-II and some phase III dances, and these dances are often quite fun. If you first teach a little cha to your dancers, and then continue with 2-step, you can also use a combination of methods. One method that is often successful in teaching 2-step called the "7-5-3 method" which was, as far as we know, originally introduced by Mike & Diana Sheridan. This was 1st shown in Europe by Bill & Carol Goss.

One of the basic advantages of this method is that it gives the dancers time to think before they take the step that determines the figure. It stresses the side, close (or forward, close) movement that is so characteristic of many 2-step figures. To use this method to teach a **2-step box** you can start by having your dancers move sideways and dance "sd, cl, sd, cl, sd, cl, fwd" (7 steps) and then of course the same action ending with a backwards step ("sd, cl, sd, cl, sd, cl, bk"). When you see that they are comfortable doing 7 steps, go to 5 steps ("sd, cl, sd, cl, fwd / sd, cl, sd, cl, bk") and then finally to 3 steps ("sd, cl, fwd / sd, cl, bk"), which would be the correct, complete, 2-step figure. You can use this method as an introduction to a number of 2-step figures, such as the **scissors** ("sd, cl, sd, cl, sd, cl, cross") teaching that the cross in front or behind determines the type of scissors.

Another figure that sometimes causes problems is the **double hitch** (or hitch 6). This figure, that quickly changes from a forward to a backward action, can be challenging for some of our dancers. If we use the 7-5-3 method, so "fwd, cl, fwd, cl, fwd, cl, back / bk, cl, bk, cl, bk, cl, forward" it often gives our dancers just that much more time to realize what they need to dance. From here you could go on to a modification of the double hitch, the **forward 2-step**. So instead of dancing "fwd, fwd, cl, fwd, cl, fwd, cl, back" they will dance "fwd, fwd, cl, fwd, cl, fwd, cl, fwd". This will help stress the closing part of the figure, and also that you go the same direction, starting with the opposite foot, twice in a row.

A figure that we have seen especially profits from this teaching method is the **turning 2-step**. Experience has shown that with a turning figure dancers sometimes concentrate so much on the fact that they have to turn, that they forget that they first have to move. Have you ever tried to turn a car that is standing still, or tried to make a turn on snow ski's without moving? It's almost impossible. In using the 7-5-3 method you first get your dancers moving sideways ("sd, cl, sd, cl, sd, cl, turn right"). Using this method you will usually see much nicer, moving, and easier to execute turning 2-steps.

The phase III figure, the **strolling vine**, is also a figure that is often incorrectly executed by the dancers. Often you will see the figure danced as a revolving figure. You can use the 7-5-3 method to re-stress the side (progressive) movement of both the left and the right turning 2-step.

We hope that you see that there are more methods than the "traditional" one, and that you might even want to give some a try. But remember, that if one method doesn't work for you, you don't have to use it - there are other alternatives you can try.