

THE BIG APPLE

The original 1937 version
Richard Powers reconstruction

This is a late 1930s jazz version of an old dance tradition from the American Appalachian Mountains, called Big Circle dances. Big Circle dances are like square dances, with a caller and square dance figures, but are done in a big circle around the room.

Columbia, South Carolina was a mixed-race town, and in 1936 a synagogue became reincarnated as an African American dance hall called The Big Apple. The black dancers danced Big Circle dances, prompted by a caller, using jazz and swing music, and also with Charleston and jazz steps.

The young white dancers and students in Columbia liked to go to this dance hall to watch from the balcony, and soon they began dancing it themselves. Some of them took it to New York City in 1937 and it quickly became a huge American dance craze. Soon thereafter, New York City became known as "The Big Apple."

MUSIC: "Jazz It Blues," a 20 bar jug band blues, to catch the original pre-NYC sound.

INTRODUCTION: 8 meas Dancers Truck and swing-kick onto stage into a circle of couples, W at R of M. Pair off into sets of 2 cpls around the circle, all facing ctr.

I. SOLO STEPS TO THE CENTER

1-4 **Right Foot In:** Tap R toe fwd twice w/o weight (ct 1,2); step bkwd R (ct 3); close L back to R (ct &); step fwd R (ct 4). Repeat with opp ft, beg L (ct 5,6,7,&,8). Styling is very loose and casual, nonchalant.

5-8 **Swing It Low:** a Charleston w/o the swivel: Tap R fwd crossed over L (ct 1); step R bkwd (ct 2); tap L bkwd behind R (ct 3); step L fwd (ct 4). Repeat.

9-12 **Swing It High:** Kick R straight fwd (ct 1); step R bkwd (ct 2); tap L bkwd (ct 3); step L fwd (ct 4). Repeat.

13-18 **Let Roosevelt Knock at the White House Do':** Stamp R fwd 3 times, each time an inch further fwd, ending w/ weight on R (ct 1,&,2); step L bkwd (ct 3); rock step R bkwd (ct 4); replace fwd onto L (ct &). Repeat twice more.

19-20 **Kill the Spider:** Turn 1/4 left and stamp R loudly fwd (ct 1); swivel R foot back and forth on the ball of the foot, in time with music (ct &,2,&,3,&,4).

II. TRUCKIN'

Truckin': a Cakewalk-like step: Rise and step fwd onto the R toe (ct 1); sink onto the R heel (ct &). Repeat wi L. Raise finger to eye level wi wagging action, both elbows slightly elevated, L hand on L hip, or L fingers touching R elbow.

Road House Truckin': Same, with some degree of hip swiveling. Turn R in, pigeon-toed on the rise (ct 1); swivel R out, rotating CW on the ball of the R ft, sinking (ct &); turn L in (ct 2); swivel L out (ct &). Repeat.

1-4 **Circle Left**: All turn L to face against LOD. Do Truckin' step individually in single-file, with M ahead of W, for 8 steps, beg R. (Note: If this dance had arisen from a ballroom tradition, the circle would have been to LOD, but the Big Apple has country dance roots, with the ancient circle-L tradition.)

5-8 **Ladies Turn Back**: Continuing Truckin, W cast in to ctr and turn back, traveling LOD in an inside circle; all M continue RLOD. 8 steps for all.

9-12 **About Face**: All turn L to reverse directions in their respective circles, Truckin' 8 steps.

13-16 **When The Merry Go 'Round Broke Down**: All offer L hands to opp ptnr (from preliminary pairing off) to do Truckin' around in a L-hand star, 8 steps, wagging free R finger. (If not paired off as 2 cpls, offer L to own ptnr instead, to turn by the L hand.)

17-20 **Swing Partners**: Face ptnr to turn ptnr in place by R elbow, Truckin' 8 steps (L finger in air).

III. SHININ'

1-20 One or more cpls (or individuals) enter circle to show off with Swing, Charleston, Shag, Tap Dance, Clogging, or other flamboyant steps, while others in the circle do the Shout, sway in place, clap or stamp.

IV. ALL SHAG

(See the Shag variations handout)

V. POSIN'

1-12 Individuals strike a pose and hold as a statue for 4 slow counts. Repeat with a different pose.

Variation: Cpl strikes a combined pose.

12-16 Same every 2 slow counts

17-20 Walk or Truck to partners for finale.

VI. FINALE

1-8 **London Bridge Shag** (Common style in Big Apple): Dancers raise both arms fwd, holding ptnr w/ palm contact, forming a bridge. Step is the Shag.

Polka Shag (unique to Big Apple): Cpl in Ballroom or London Bridge pos, M step L to L (ct 1); close R to L (ct &); step L to L (ct 2); kick R crossed behind L (ct &). Repeat to R (ct 3,&,4,&).

Execute **8-count Shag**: S-S-QQQQ.

Repeat both.

9-16 **Kick The Mule**: All take hands in one circle, facing ctr. Walk fwd 3 steps (ct 1,2,3); kick fwd (ct 4); walk bkwd 4 steps (cts 5-8). Repeat.

17-20 **Praise Allah**: All drop hands and Truck fwd 4 steps, crouching low to shake spread hands close to the floor while advancing (ct 1,2,3,4). Truck fwd 4 more steps, rising and raising hands fwd to the sky.