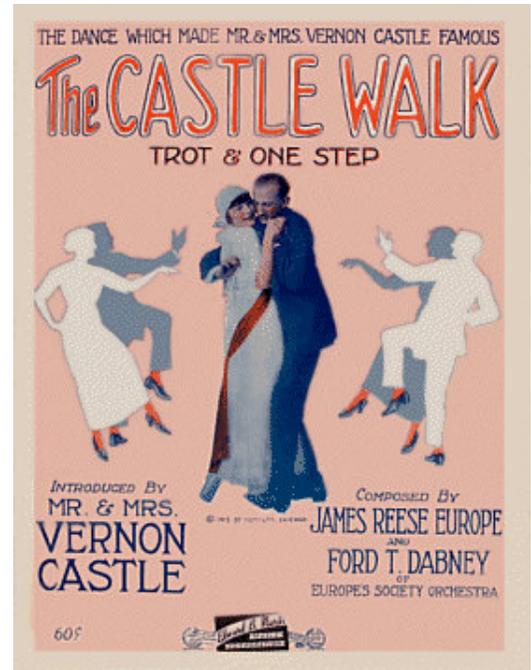


The Castle Walk

Richard Powers

Vernon and Irene Castle set the prototype for American social dancing during the Ragtime Era. The Castle Walk was the Castle's style of dancing the most popular dance of the era, the One-Step.

The Castles dancing is preserved in their 1915 film *The Whirl of Life*, and Fred Astaire accurately portrayed their style of dancing in the 1939 film *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*. Fred Astaire is recognized as a primary source on the Castles' style of dancing because he had watched the Castles dance many times when he was a teenager performing in Vaudeville.



Music: Too Much Mustard (*Très Moutarde*) by Cecil Macklin.

Introduction: 4 bars (1 bar = the time of two steps), or 8 counts. Touch-kick on the last 2 counts: touch the inside toe to the floor without weight, (feet closed) with a slight downward pounce, then kick it back, with a slight hop on the supporting foot.

1. CASTLE WALK

In closed waltz position, back the lady with a One-step, taking one step to each count, with the lady walking backwards, beginning R, and the man forward, beginning L, traveling line-of-dance (LOD). Style is smooth walking with long steps, walking tall on the balls of the feet with somewhat straightened legs, swaying but without pumping the arms violently. Walk 14 steps (a full phrase of 8 plus 6 more), and on the last 2 counts touch-kick.

REPEAT the 14 steps and the touch-kick.

2. EIGHT STEP & CHASSE

In closed promenade position, both walk forward 3 steps into the center of the room, pivoting a quarter-turn clockwise on the third step. In counter-promenade position, walk 3 steps against LOD, pivoting a quarter-turn on the 3rd step. Repeat both, traveling toward the outside wall, then counter-promenade in LOD, traveling in a square pattern. On counts 12-16, do 4 pivot steps CW in place, with the woman pivoting L around his R foot on count 12 (the last step of the square).

Chassé (galop) 7 slides toward LOD. On count 8, turn halfway CW with a step-hop. Repeat with the opposite feet, LOD, in counter-promenade position. He stops (R foot) on count 7 to let her pass by him into the next figure.

3. POMANDER TURN

Shift to Right Yale position (right hip to right hip) and walk forward around each other 8 steps, dipping on the 8th step to stop. Then both walk backwards (CCW) for 6 steps and turn the lady under: he stops and turns her under his raised L arm as she spins to the right one full turn in two steps, R & L.

REPEAT.

4. GRAPEVINE & PROMENADE TURNOUT

Facing partners, both take a side step toward LOD (his L, her R) then cross the other foot over in front of the first foot. Take another side step then cross behind. Repeat this 4-step phrase twice more (12 steps of a Grapevine).

Both walk 2 steps forward LOD on closed promenade position, then pivot a full turn in 2 more steps (he steps around her with his L as she steps forward R between his feet, then she steps around him). Exit from the pivot by swinging to left-shoulder Yale.

5. ZIG-ZAG

In Left Yale position, the man walks 3 steps forward diagonally to the right. On count 4 he points his R foot to right side (to the floor) without weight and twists to Right Yale position. He then walks forward diagonally to the left with 3 steps (R-L-R) and points his L to the left side, twisting into Left Yale position.

REPEAT the Zig and the Zag.

Meanwhile the lady walks backward with the opposite footwork, always crossing behind.

6. SERPENTINE

The gent backs for 8 steps as the lady advances: each step swivels and crosses in front or behind the other (i.e. the lady crosses her R over to the left side then immediately crosses her L over her R, and so on). After the 8 steps, the gent then advances LOD while the lady backs up, both doing 8 more Serpentine steps. The more lively style, which Fred Astaire knew from watching the Castles, is a step-hop on each cross-step, like skipping.

7. WIND-UP

Both dancers back away from each other for 2 steps, still holding hands (his L and her R) as arms extend to their full reach. Then he turns in place to his left with 4 steps (half-turn) as she walks 4 steps forward toward her left, circling clockwise around the gent while her R hand wraps around his neck. This brings them face-to-face and they slip into waltz position to commence pivots.

8. PIVOTS (TRAVELING TURNS)

On counts 7 and 8 of the previous phrase, the dancers commence a long sequence of traveling pivots. These are the same as the concluding pivots of the Promenade Turnout above, but continue with a full turn (360°) with each 2 steps. These pivots may meander around on one spot, but ideally, they travel in a straight line, progressing LOD. To accomplish this, each must help the other get around. Take small L steps around your partner (R foot steps forward between partner's legs), not large steps to the side. The L foot may kick to the rear when free.

9. THE SPIN

Vernon Castle wrote, "This is probably the most important step of all." You may already know it as a contradance buzz-step swing. Both start on the right foot (the man makes a quick foot-fudge). Facing partner squarely, 1) cross R foot slightly over L foot. &) step side L. Repeat 5 more times, for a total of 6. Your R foot drops almost on the spot each time, and your L foot "paddles" to propel your spin. On counts 7-8, do the same touch-kick as in the Introduction, with the man facing LOD.

10. CASTLE WALK

Repeat the opening sequence and its repeat.

Sources:

Vernon and Irene Castle - MODERN DANCING - New York, 1914

Vernon and Irene Castle - "The Whirl of Life" silent film - New York, 1915

Elsie Janis - "The Castle Walk, Simple, But Heaps of Fun" - Chicago Sunday Tribune, 1913

N. Georgevitch - "Theory of the Castle Walk Dance" - Berlin, 1913

"Home Lessons in the Latest Dances, The Castle Walk" - San Francisco Chronicle, 1914

Fred Astaire choreography of Castle Walk in "The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle" - 1939