

THE TEXAS TOMMY

Also known as the Texas Tommy Swing
(United States)

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This historic American dance is widely recognized as the earliest form of swing dancing, created by African Americans in San Francisco's Barbary Coast around 1910. We had only vague descriptions of the Texas Tommy until a silent film recently surfaced with scenes of San Francisco, circa 1910, featuring clips of two couples doing the Texas Tommy. We clearly see that it was an evolution of the two-step, which was in turn a modification of the polka. Johnny Peters took the Texas Tommy to New York in 1911 where it achieved brief fame in vaudeville before evolving into the Lindy Hop over the next fifteen years.

MUSIC: 1910 Ragtime

RHYTHM: 4/4 time

TEMPO: Approximately 100 beats/min

FORMATIONS:

- 1 Cpls in variations of Ballroom pos. One was a shoulder hold. Another was M's R arm around W's waist with her L hand holding his R bicep; M's L hand holding W's R bicep or elbow w/ her R hand floating free.
- 2 Open 2-hand hold, facing ptrn.
- 3 Back-to-back open 2-hand hold.
- 4 Single R-to-R hand hold.
- 5 Tandem Pos (W's back to M's front in an open 2-hand hold, hands held at W's shoulder height).

STEPS

1. Texas Tommy Basic Step:

M steps side L (ct 1); hops L bringing his R in the air behind his L (ct 2); scuffs his R foot downward to the ground and away to his R (ct 3); hops L (ct 4). Repeat opp. side.

W dances opposite steps, mirror image.

Style: Vertical posture, very loose and easygoing, with free hands floating easily, with a downward bouncing throughout like a jackhammer.

2. Texas Tommy Polka:

M steps side L, at the same time flicking the R foot out to the R side (ct 1); R approaches L (ct 2); steps side L as above (ct 3); hold (ct 4). Repeat opp. W dances opposite steps, mirror image.

Shoulder-Hold Pos. Posture is lower to the ground than the Texas Tommy Basic Step.

3. Texas Tommy Galop:

Version A: Cts 1 and 2 of the Texas Tommy Polka repeated, traveling toward the M's L side.

Version B (not done in class): M drops L in place while at the same time flicking the R foot out to the R side (ct 1); take wt with the extended R toe and L approaches R. Repeat traveling to the M's R side.

4. **Texas Tommy Pivots** (Dynamic Pivots). W steps R in place, R foot pointed to R, as M steps L around W's R foot, rotating halfway CW (ct 1); Repeat w/ opp. roles (ct 2). Repeat, traveling in LOD.

FIGURES

1) Texas Tommy Basic:

Texas Tommy Basic Step done in an open 2-hand hold facing partner, neither rotating nor traveling.

2) **Back-to-Back:** Same step, letting go of one hand to roll away to back-to-back position and re-take free hand. Return to facing ptr. Take either hand and turn in either direction.

3) Right-to-Right Hands:

Same step, M gives his R hand over to W's R hand, facing ptr with Basic Step holding R/R hands.

4) W's Underarm Turn:

Same step, M encircles W's head to lead her to turn CW or CCW, w/ either his R or L hand.

5) Free Spin:

When doing Pivots, M lets W go, she does one full pivot turn solo. M catches W's R hand w/ his L and immediately brings her back in to more pivots. Or he catches her R hand w/ his R hand to bring her into Tandem Pos.

6) Hand Behind Her Back Swing-out:

M places W's R hand comfortably behind her back during the pivots, takes it with his R hand, then lets her unwind to swing-out position and rewind back in again, placing his free L hand on her R shoulder. Or from this R-to-R hands, he may bring her into Tandem pos.

The two couples in the film clips did many more figures but these are some of the essential ones.