

Notes from Richard Powers:

I love all kinds of waltzing. The original German (rotary) waltz, the later left-turn (Viennese) waltz, box step waltz, country walking waltz, tango valse cruzado, 5-step waltz, zweifachers, polskas, etc.

But I often hear people say that their favorite is cross-step waltz. This is the most common topic of the essays that my students write, and they are often specific on the reasons why they like it so much. Zachariah Cassady, director of Waltz Etcetera in Seattle, wrote, "Cross-step waltz, my personal favorite, is the best partner dance in the world."

Why? I think that it's easier to innovate if one understands the reasons and dynamics behind the dance.

The Five Fundamental Advantages of Cross-Step Waltz

1) In traditional waltz, a dancer steps directly into his/her partner on count one, in a closed frame. In cross-step waltz, you can break out of the frame into something creative right at the beginning of the phrase, because at the beginning of the basic step you're facing forward side-by-side.

And in cross-step waltz the Follow is traveling **forward** on count 1, letting her instantly travel into a variation. In box waltz she's stepping back on 1, and thus must wait until halfway through the figure, count 4, to travel forward out of the frame.

a) Because you're facing forward side-by-side in cross-step waltz, you can travel laterally forward together, borrowing figures like promenade or grapevine from the One-Step, Tango and Foxtrot.

b) Or the Follow can pass by in front of the Lead, or turn under his arm, or the Lead can do either, thereby borrowing figures from Swing and Salsa.

c) Or you can stay in the rotating frame and borrow figures like pivots from the Waltz, Polka and Schottische. In other words, you can easily and instantly adapt figures from literally any other social dance form into cross-step waltz.

2a) Then an important part of innovating a new variation is **getting out of it**, returning back to the basic step.

In box step waltz, you have to align exactly, and one partner must step directly into the other, as in exiting from an Box Underarm Turn. In rotary waltz, he must get in front of her with a carefully placed left foot, as she must step with her right foot exactly in between his feet. But in cross-step waltz you return to your partner's side, without intertwined footwork, which is **much** easier and safer. Even the trickiest figures are easy to recover from in cross-step waltz.

2b) Similarly, the mirrored footwork symmetry and visual tracking of your partner make it very easy to foot-fudge to match your partner's steps, in case an experimental step messes up, or if someone accidentally gets off-phase.

3) Some social dances are comprised of one basic step repeated, like the Waltz, traveling around the room; fans call this "trance-like." Other social dances are constantly changing figures, like Swing, Salsa and Tango. But cross-step waltz can be done in either mode, as the Lead chooses (or as the Lead senses that the Follow prefers). Doing no variations other than the Turning Basic for three minutes can be sublimely satisfying. And a highly active succession of figures can be a blast. Or shifting from one paradigm to the other offers great variety and contrast.

This dual mode also allows the Lead to relax and coast with a Turning Basic if he wants to, without fear of boring his partner, unlike dances like the Hustle where he **must** come up with a new figure every second-and-a-half without a break. This takes a lot of pressure off the Lead. Follows also enjoy the break of serene traveling, instead of constantly being challenged to respond to a new figure every few seconds.

4) Cross-step waltz allows the most equal balance between the Lead and Follow roles of any social dance, partially because the basic step is the same in Lead and Follow roles, mirrored. We acknowledge the inherent differences between Lead and Follow, but we like to two roles to be as equal as possible. This symmetry also makes role-reversal easier than any of the other social dances.

5) Some dances are easy to learn, like 4-count Street Swing, but remain too easy to hold the interest of advanced dancers. So on a difficulty scale of 1-to-10, the entire range of the dance is only 1 to 4. Other dance forms are so difficult that beginners find them hard to even begin. The difficulty of Tango Argentino or West Coast Swing might range from 4 to 10, with difficulty level 4 feeling overwhelming to a beginner.

Cross-step waltz is the best of both, spanning the full range from 1 to 10. Beginners find themselves traveling around the floor successfully in their very first lesson; then the most experienced dancers are still challenged at the most advanced levels, years later.

These are five ways that cross-step waltz is *uniquely* advantageous, but there are also other positive aspects of cross-step waltz that are held in common with other dance forms. For instance, I wouldn't say that traveling dances are "better" than stationary dances like salsa, but there is an undeniable kinesthetic pleasure with dances that travel at a good speed around the floor, with a partner in your arms. Many people find traveling dances to be especially satisfying.