

# Blues Dancing, Old and New

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The first two kinds of blues step below were American steps that were recorded by the French who noted in great detail what the Americans were dancing in Paris during the 1920s and 30s.

**Basic One-Step Blues**, the most basic and most common 1920s style.

- \* Basic, backing the woman or backing the man.
- \* Side Steps: side-close, repeated.
- \* Rotating in place, CW or CCW.
- \* Double Hesitation: Step backing follow, replace, step backing lead, replace.
- \* Crab Walk: a repeating Double Hesitation, Lead faces in, while slowly traveling to his R/her L side in diagonal steps. Every step faces your partner.

**Different handholds:** shoulder hold, held hand folded in, "muscleman" hold with his L hand at his L hip, and single-arm hold, maybe with the free hand in your pocket.

**Three-step Blues.**

One of the earliest Blues timings (once called Fox Blues or Jazz Blues), still common today.

- \* Basic side-close-side Two-Step, to both sides, in place.
- \* Traveling Zig-Zags.
- \* Rotating.
- \* Rocking Steps, with a bit of a side lead.
- \* Staggering Step (he crosses behind as she crosses in front on the second step)

**Original blues traveled** across the dance floor, because it was based on the one-step and two-step, both of which traveled LOD. The amount of traveling was less in blues, and it wasn't always in LOD, but it moved, as opposed to staying in place. Today's blues is mostly danced on one spot, just occasionally traveling.

**SS-QQQQ timing** (1914 Castle's Foxtrot and Kurt Lichtmann's "Wedding Foxtrot")

- 2 swaying side steps then turn in place with 4 quick pivots, or take 4 quick steps going anywhere.
- Side-close, side-close in place (step-touch), replacing the 2 swaying side steps, then 4 quick steps.

Body styling on the slow swaying side steps:

Lead with your hip to the side in which you're traveling.

Lead with your ribcage in that direction.

This body motion is isolated, not necessarily conveyed to your partner through a firm frame, so you therefore don't have to match your partner's body movement.

## TODAY'S BLUES

About a dozen years ago, some of the Lindy hop events and exchanges with late nights started to slow the music down in the wee hours of the morning. Sometimes there was a second room for this slow or "blues" music. The 2001 Austin Lindy Exchange had a separate Blues room, for example.

Interpretation of blues music was informal and highly individual back then, but a "basic step" began to emerge from the randomness: Side-sways or a step-touch in place.

This was mostly based on the slow dancing those kids already knew: Prom dancing from high school. They wouldn't have phrased it that way, but that's the slow dancing tradition they already knew, as opposed to traveling across the floor in a repeated timing pattern, like the original 1920s/30s blues. So the reason why original blues mostly traveled, but the new blues is mostly danced in place, is because the new blues was based on Prom dancing, which is mostly danced in place. This is fine! No one is implying that the earlier version was better. Today's Blues movement is wonderful.

Today's Blues dancers combine these slow side-sway steps with various combinations of quick steps, just like the 1920s historic blues we did, but this does not mean that today's blues evolved from the original blues. It didn't. It was a clean break, with the Lindy exchange kids having no exposure to the original blues. The new blues dancing had combinations of slow and quick steps for the same reason the original did - that's the only thing that works to most tempos of blues music.

**THE BASIC STEP** is a side-step, then touch closed without weight. Repeat opposite. Another version is to sway side to side with feet apart. (Which of these two is "prom dancing"? That depends on which high school you went to.)

**PULSE:** Up-down movement, which is similar to the African American Cakewalk from 100 years ago. Slightly rise on the downbeats, slightly sinking in between.

The Pulse is optional. You can occasionally move downward on the downbeat for variety.

A few teachers insist that the Pulse is more "authentic" blues because it's an African American styling. Others scoff at calling this "authentic Blues" when it's actually a made-up dance based on white kids' prom dancing. I don't want to take sides on that debate.

The **Triple Step** can be a rocking side-side-side, keeping the QQS timing from the Fox Blues above.

**The Triple Step can also travel to the side** instead of rocking in place. This becomes the Two-Step that we did above.

**Push-Off** (False-Step Corté): Take a side step then push right back to where you were. You practiced lead/follow on this, to both sides.

Practice combination: 2 quick Push-Offs then one Two-Step to the side. If you use the rocking two-step, it feels like 3 Push-Offs then a side step.

**Timing Lag.** The Follow can step a moment after the Lead. This mirrors the lag that musicians often do when playing or singing Blues music.

Or you can both Lag. Instead of giving weight with a side step exactly on the downbeat, you can be \*reaching\* over on the downbeat, actually giving weight to that side slightly late, or lagged.

**The frame in Blues isn't rigid.** It's flexible enough to allow your partner their own body styling, or the possibility of lagging behind the downbeat.

**Invert the Step-Touch** to get a **Touch-Step**. Touch-Step was the predominant way of dancing swing in the rock'n'roll 1950s.

Syling: Brush with a small ronde-de-jambe circular arc on the floor, initiating the movement from your hip.

### **Single-Hand Connection**

Since today's Blues arose from the Lindy scene, it naturally incorporates swing moves and dancing in swingout position, holding one or two hands.

Keep your connecting hand low, with a bit "water skiing" connection tug.

### **Invitational Turns**

He invites here to turn under his arm, but she decides how fast or slow to go under, and with what styling. He doesn't direct the speed of her turning under.

You can use either hand. Either inside or outside turns. Either he or she goes under. That's eight permutations.