

Partnered Rotations

Turns, Spins and Swivels

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Don't you just hate it when a perfectly good word ends up meaning more than one thing? Take ... hmmm I don't know, TURN for example. In some cases it means any kind of rotation. But sometimes we have more specific terms for particular kinds of turn, like **spins**, or **swivels**, or **spirals**, or **pivots**. And then we just plain old **turn**.

In order to create a context for today's discussion, I would like to offer some definitions of three particular types of rotation: turn, spin and swivel.

- 1. Turn – A rotation of the body as measured between the feet, i.e. the feet must have different alignments and the rotation is accomplished in the hips. Turn occurs between steps.**
- 2. Spin – A rotation of the standing foot so that it has a different alignment at the beginning of the rotation than at the end of the rotation. The hips do not change relative to the standing foot.**
- 3. Swivel – The combination of turn and spin: the hips rotate relative to the standing foot and the foot has a different alignment at the beginning of the rotation than at the end of the rotation. A change in position relative to the partner results (e.g. Banjo to SCP)**

It is useful to note that figures which involve **spin** tend to have the word “spin” in their name: OUTSIDE SPIN; DOUBLE REVERSE SPIN; and the ever popular SPIN TURN.

Likewise, figures that involve a swivel tend to have the word “swivel” in their name.

These are useful clues as to which technique to apply when dancing a figure.

Turn is the one of these three which is perhaps the most troublesome. I believe this is because of the fact that the word can mean both the class ROTATION as well as the specific technique of stepping from one foot to the next where the step taken has a different alignment from the previous one. This is why specifications of turn are given as BETWEEN steps N-1 and N, where N is the step you just took.

Actually, there is a formula for the specification of AMOUNT OF TURN (the class, not the specific technique: **turn**):

An amount (no turn, commence, 1/8, 1/4, 3/8, 1/2, etc.)

A direction (Left Face (LF) or Right Face (RF))

When (ON a step, BETWEEN step N-1 and N)

ON is used in two cases:

1. when the amount specified is COMMENCE, which also means that the alignment of this step is the same as the alignment of the previous step.
2. when the amount of rotation can be calculated based on a single foot. (The above example does not include this case.)

BETWEEN is used when the amount of turn is measured using both feet and is given by measuring the change in alignment between the current step and the previous step.

All specifications of the technical element AMOUNT OF TURN follow (or should follow) this formula.

Let's look at a simple example from Waltz: Two Left Turns. First here are the steps:

1. L forward
2. R to side (on outside of turn)
3. L closes to R
4. R back
5. L to side (on inside of turn)
6. R closes to L

Now let's look at the alignment of each step:

1. Facing DC
2. Backing DW
3. Backing LOD
4. Backing LOD
5. Pointing DW
6. Facing DW

Finally, let's look at the actual specification of the amounts of turn (remember our formula)

Commence to turn LF on 1
1/4 turn LF between 1 and 2
1/8 turn LF between 2 and 3
Commence to turn LF on 4
3/8 turn LF between 4 and 5, body turns less
Body completes turn on 6

These technical specifications (taken directly from the DVIDA manual (modified to Round Dance abbreviations) which is identical to the specification from IDTA) tell us a great deal about the fundamental nature of Rotation, and in particular **turn**.

Notice that the specified alignments tell us exactly the amount of turn. Notice also that given a starting alignment and the specified amounts of turns, we could calculate each of the alignments.

Now, the clever reader will at this point wonder WHY? Why me? Why am I stuck in this lecture? Or perhaps, "what does this have to do with anything that matters to ME", would be a more relevant

question. (Forgive my penchant for the dramatic when it comes to suffering, and yes, ladies and gentlemen, in case you have failed to notice, we are suffering.)

Some people are fond of teaching curving into turns. While this is a valiant attempt to gain understanding of HOW rotation works, it is impossible to reconcile this kind of movement with the specifications of the technique as it is given. And I do believe that (in most cases) the technique is very well specified, and, given a sufficient understanding of the language being used, quite clear. The tricky bit is, naturally, that little phrase “sufficient understanding”.

For today, we will attempt to NOT curve our turns. After today, you will, naturally do as you please, as will I. Except when I trying and failing, which happens far more often then I would like. Especially on Tuesdays.

Aside from a clear understanding of the language which is used to specify rotation in the couple, it is also useful to understand the fundamental nature of movement as a couple. Perhaps the single most important thing to learn about this is the physical nature of what it means to be either ON THE INSIDE or ON THE OUTSIDE of turn.

Picture a circle big enough to stand in with your feet more than shoulder width apart. Now, stand inside that circle with your feet together and the toes of both feet touching it. Slowly slide the left foot leftwards tracing the arc of the circle with the toes of your left foot in contact with the circle. In so doing, you are essentially drawing the circle from the inside. Now stop with your weight between feet and look at them. Notice what your feet have done. Notice what your hips have done. You are standing on the INSIDE OF TURN. We will define this in a moment.

Close the right foot to the left foot keeping the right foot in contact with the arc of the circle. It too is moving ON THE INSIDE of the circle.

Now, picture that same circle, but stand outside of the circle with your feet together and your toes touching the outside of the circle. Slowly slide your right foot rightwards around the circle tracing the arc of the circle with your toes. Stop with your feet apart. Notice what your feet have done. Notice what your hips have done. You are standing on the OUTSIDE OF TURN. We will define this in a moment.

Close the left foot to the right foot keeping the left foot in contact with the arc of the circle. It too is moving ON THE OUTSIDE of the circle.

The trick to doing this is do this WITH another person in front of you so that you stay in Closed Position all the time without shifting on each other. The nice thing is, if you can figure it out, it really cleans up a lot of movement and makes the dancing much easier.

Now for some definitions:

INSIDE OF TURN – when the toes of the feet, when measured between steps, are farther from the center line of the body than the heels.

OUTSIDE OF TURN – when the heels of the feet, when measured between steps, are farther from the center line of the body than the toes.

That being the last of the definitions we want to cover today, let's try to apply some of these ideas to actual steps and movement and just see what happens.

Good luck, and try not to hurt yourself or your partner, and for goodness sake, try very hard not to hurt me.