



Larrys Corner

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Do you have any likes or dislikes, stories, or helpful hints for dancing? If so, write it down and give to Larry Ablin or Barb Johnson. We will add it to one of the future News letters.

If you would like to tell us how you became interested in dancing, write it down and give to Larry or Barb, we will add your picture with it and put it in one of the future Newsletters. If you have anything you would like to write about, just write it up and give to Barb or Larry. I enjoy writing something for you.

Come Dance With Us

Hustle Slotted

At the local Hustle dance, I was able to measure slot lengths in the range of about 1-2 meters (3-6 feet) depending on the height and energy of the dancers. A typical slot was about 1.3 meters (4 feet) in length. The music was averaging 120 bpm or even a little faster at times.

Good dancers will shorten the slot for faster music.

The feet move the full length of the slot, but in most Hustle moves, the center of gravity of the body will move considerably less. (Lean back when decelerating, lean forward when accelerating.)

To slot or not to slot... that is the question; Depending on what part of the country you're from and how crowded the floor is, Hustle can be danced strictly slotted (a la WCS), in a rotating slot, or as a traveling dance. A lot of Hustle figures work out well when danced in a triangle, e.g. 120 degree turn at each end of the slot instead of 180 degrees. For traveling, I use alternating forward and back grapevines and free spins with an overturned basic exit.

Regarding circle vs. slotted: "It all depends on how the guy leads it (and how crowded the floor is)."

Some of the verbal history regarding the origins of Hustle describes it as a rotating or rotating slot dance. What happened is that teachers re-codified it as a slot dance because it was easier to teach that way. A strict slot allows you to pack a bigger class onto the floor and helps keep beginners from under turning the patterns. Hustle HAS evolved a lot since the disco era;

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for one thing, it's now mostly done to slower music (e.g. "Vogue" vs. "Turn The Beat Around") which makes it easier to "close the slot".

All the beginning and intermediate Hustle patterns I've ever seen are taught to begin and end with the slot in the same orientation. Most newcomers, especially those who come to Hustle from ECS, let this fall apart a little bit, especially on faster music. That doesn't make it right. The slot doesn't "rotate", in the sense that if we start out in a north-south slot, that's the way, we stay. Folks who allow the slot to "rotate" are viewed as being sloppy. Perhaps they teach a stationary slot because it's the most appropriate on today's crowded dance floors. Then again, perhaps it's because he thinks that's the way the dance should be done.

I learned Hustle as a slot dance. But after watching several old-time Hustle dancers and several top level pros dance it as a rotating slot, I experimented with a rotating slot and found I preferred it to a strict slot for many patterns. A rotating slot (my definition: lady travels in a straight line from one end of a slot to another, but doesn't turn an exact 180 degrees for the next slot.) allows you to dance geometric figures like triangles and squares. It also allows you to travel by weaving the slot across the floor. Hustle used to be circular, but that nowadays it's been modified into a slot dance. The woman moves in a slot. The guy, of necessity, makes more of an ellipse.

Given the floor space, most Hustle uses as much real estate available and the slot rotate. I paid particular attention to the dancers doing the Hustle. I watched as others used almost every square inch of floor, with slots varying all over the compass. Perhaps we should teach a stationary slot because it's the most appropriate on today's crowded dance floors. If they do it because they're deliberately trying to use up floor, or as part of patterns that are designed to rotate the slot, that's one thing. If they're doing it because, e.g., they just aren't bothering to get all the way around on a turning closed basic, that's sloppy, and I don't care who they are. Of course, if there is very little room on the floor, a strict slot is sometimes the safe thing to do.

Hustle the Character

West Coast Swing (WCS) has a kind of "hanging-back" look, \---/, where there is a slight pull. In contrast, Hustle is vertical, where the lady is like a spinning top perfectly balanced over her feet (like a yo-yo that goes sideways :-)

Hustle should have a light and smooth lead, without the "pull" or "push" off each other found in swing. The lady must move herself and she must be balanced properly so only a slight lead causes her to move the proper direction. Hustle typically has lots of spinning, and strong leads inhibit the spins.

Whereas WCS emphasizes lower body styling, complex syncopations, and sensual moves, Hustle has simple footwork and more upper body motions and the use of hands to provide emphasis of the stronger, more up-tempo beat. A key difference between WCS and Hustle is the woman's part. In WCS the woman should provide a strong anchor at the end of the patterns. In Hustle, part of her job is to insure that the dance flows. Hustle is an "attack dance". At the 'ball-change' (the "&3") both the man and the woman should be coming out or building their momentum. Instead of anchoring, the woman comes forward... WITHOUT A LEAD. If she waits for a lead then the patterns fall behind the beat. AS A RESULT THE LEADS ARE VERY LIGHT. Because she is already moving, the man just guides her along. The leads in Hustle are among the lightest of all the club dances. The faster the music, the lighter the leads should be-and this is all dependent on the woman coming for-

ward on the 3.

The key difference between Hustle and WCS is the initial lead. In Hustle the woman should aggressively step forward on "one" unless prevented, whereas in WCS the woman should stay in place on "one" unless led forward. In WCS you need a good connection to start a pattern, whereas in Hustle you can dance with a good follower by only indicating where to turn and barely connecting otherwise.

Hustle is different from WCS. In West Coast, the follower should never step forward on "1" unless led; in Hustle basic, the woman should always think "step forward on "3" unless prevented" (Well ladies, you should really be led into stepping strongly, but yes, stepping forward on 1 is the thing to do). This give Hustle a more ballistic feel than West Coast Swing. In the Hustle closed basic, the man brings her forward while he does the check step. It is a 'rubber band action', which stretches on that coaster-step, and leads her forward on the 3. The man does not rock the lady back like in a WCS throw out.

In NY slotted Hustle, counted &123, stepping forward on 1 isn't back leading. As an example of this, let me use a man's free spin: In WCS, if I release a woman's hand without any forward pressure or motion and do a free spin I would expect her to anchor in place and to be on the same side of the slot as I left her. (Actually, to avoid unexpected collisions, I would check to make sure the woman isn't the kind who coasters instead of anchors before I try a free spin.) In Hustle, I would do a free spin slightly off the center of the slot, and afterwards expect to find the woman across the slot or rotating the slot around me even if I didn't lead her hand forward beforehand. It's very disconcerting to find she had stopped to watch me spin and I have to go an extra 1/2 spin to find her.

WCS has a very tight lead-follow method in which the woman would never step forward ahead of the lead. Relatively speaking, Hustle feels like a much lighter lead to me than WCS. The issue of the woman coming forward without an apparent lead is, to some extent, a moot point. I would never not lead the woman forward on 1, so it would never be readily apparent that the woman was coming forward ahead of the lead.

Another key difference is in the "flow of movement" through the dance. The follower's movement in Hustle should evoke a feeling of mostly flowing, continuous movement (which matches well with the steady, continuous, (monotonous?) beat of Hustle music). E.g. in a series of walk-around turns (open turning basic, two hands), or closed turning basics for that matter, the follower should never stop moving--her momentum is simply redirected from one direction to another. Whereas in WCS, the anchor step at the end of the slot provides a definite "stopping point" in most patterns. The followers "step forward by default" rule goes right along with the follower's need to keep the movement "flowing".

Hustle emphasizes woman's turns, and there are many abrupt reversals of the direction of turn. This means that, most of the time, the woman can't* retain TURNING momentum from one set of three counts to the next. (There are exceptions, the most obvious being the woman's free traveling spin, four-count turns, etc.) If she does, many patterns will become difficult and/or awkward. Next to mastering the turns themselves, this is the single point that followers have the most trouble with in Hustle. Leaders have great difficulty trying to lead a follower to turn to their right when she is expecting to turn to her left, just because she turned left on the last three counts!

"Newton's First Law of Dance: A Follower in motion continues in motion until an external force acts upon her." The follower keeps turning until something stops her. My idea is to have the follower move to the music (force) until perturbed in her motion by a lead (another force).

Dance Travel

This is a mind boggling section! When I first did the things I'll explain in this section, the response I received blew my mind. But before we start, let me ask a question. How many of you have traveled to a new place (anywhere, even in the US), gone to a salsa club, asked people to dance, only to be turned down over and over again? How many of you have been able to walk into a club alone in a new area, find people to dance with, and make a ton of new friends without getting sloppy drunk? No, it's not impossible, but it's damn difficult. Well, actually, it doesn't have to be. Before I get into it, let me tell you in advance, this section is written by a guy, who at the time was a beginner/intermediate dancer. I'm not quite sure what the results would be for a woman (they would probably be ok), but I can't recommend it (for obvious reasons as may become evident).

If you had asked me about trips to places I had taken before, I might have answered "they were fun", and maybe I had met a few locals wherever I went. However, since I've started dancing, trips and vacation have taken on an entirely new meaning (both for good and bad, as I'll explain). I've done some extensive traveling since the time I started dancing, and I've certainly had some of the greatest experiences in my life during these travels. I enjoy traveling quite a bit, but my job used to keep me from ever being able to do it, so when I got a chance to go travel a bit, I leapt on it.

Wherever I have gone, even though I often traveled alone, I have instantly made friends, met numerous people, and been invited into people's homes and lives. I doubt that, without dance, people can appreciate the kind of social avenues dancing opens up for you during travels. It's absolutely incredible, and it's a significant part of what this section is about. In summary, before I get down into it, the crux of the matter was, wherever I went, I instantly had a huge (sometimes too big) group of friends who went out dancing. Now, it certainly wasn't confined to dancing (some showed me around town, the sites, let me stay with them, etc . . .), but to arrive in a strange new place, and instantly have a large group of friends whom you meet and bond with almost instantly, **NO MATTER WHERE IN THE WORLD YOU GO**, is simply incredible. Whenever I went somewhere I knew absolutely **NOBODY**, yet by the time I left, it felt like I knew **EVERYBODY**. All this, sometimes in the course of just a few days . . .

On these trips, as opposed to trips earlier in my life, I would tend to go out dancing almost every single night. Some of these trips were quite long (a few weeks or more), so you can imagine the amount of nightlife I'm talking about.

When you know how to dance the hardest part of getting in with the local crowd is to find the first dance partner. Once the others see if you can dance then you will or won't be accepted, depending on how well you dance.

If you take lessons but never go out dancing. Or if you go dancing without ever learning how to dance, you will have a harder time being accepted at a different dance or town.

So be sure to get out and dance and take lessons to get better and better.