

ATLANTA SWING  
DANCERS CLUB



# An Introduction to West Coast Swing

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## Instructor Manual

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A product of the Dance Improvement Program

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# An Introduction to West Coast Swing

## Instructor Manual

### Version 1.1

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This document is a product of the Dance Improvement Program approved by the 2004 ASDC Board of Directors

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To the Instructor:

The ASDC offers a continuing series of lessons in WCS. Each student is provided the ASDC Introduction to West Coast Swing manual and video to guide practice. Should you start teaching at other than Lesson 1, the manual shows what they were taught and you will continue with the material listed for each lesson. Thank you for teaching for the Club. The following information and material will assist you.

The ASDC provides the infrastructure for the lessons. We advertise, arrange for the floor, provide students with support material, collect the money, determine who should be on the floor, and provide practice music. This leaves the instructor free to teach.

We are committed to providing quality instruction for the lessons as advertised thus we start-stop on time and cover material listed for the lesson. The Practice Assistants Program works to assist students. Should a slow student require extra attention a PA may work with that student so the instructor can continue with the lesson. It is important that one student not retard the progress of the group.

The Dance Director or other Board representatives may provide members to stand in when there is a gender imbalance. As a perfect balance is not always possible we request that you rotate the students frequently which also gives students exposure to a variety of partners during the lesson. Should you have concerns or questions please consult the Dance Director or other appropriate Board representative.

The instructor's primary interface with the Club is through The Dance Improvement Program Committee. Please see the description of this committee later in this document.

### **PA participation in Club Night lessons.**

PAs are encouraged to participate in the basic lessons to sharpen their skills and assist students. PAs may take the Club Basics Night lessons free of charge on a space available basis under the following conditions:

1. PAs wear an identifying badge.
2. PAs rotate and dance their gender appropriate role. When two PAs are paired they may switch roles.
3. The PA agrees to be paired with a new student at the discretion of the Dance Director.
4. A PA may not practice during a rotation when this deprives a student of a partner. This may occur when the lesson is not gender balanced.
5. The Dance Director or other appropriate representative decides who participates when there are more PAs than positions available.

The Dance Director needs PAs available to assist in lessons. PAs who make a prior commitment to attending the lesson as a PA will be given preference for non-paid slots.

## **Information from Brandi Tobias.**

As speed of learning varies you may add to or shorten a lesson as needed. If you are in a strict structure you should use any extra time to review and correct common mistakes observed during practice.

### **Specific to the lessons.**

Lesson 1: Mention connection, hand hold. Have students move their weight back and forth but don't expect application at this point. Get them to come back.

Lesson 2: Talk about connection during the review. Practice the following dance sequence: Closed, left side pass, sugar push, underarm turn, left side pass. Get them to come back.

Lesson 3: Talk about use of feet and legs during the triple step exercise.

Lesson 4:

Lesson 5: For the whip, separate the men and ladies when teaching footwork.

Lesson 6: Work with the group to correct common mistakes observed during practice. Encourage them to repeat the lessons. Can add underarm release as a bonus if there is time

### **Closed Position**

Man's right hand is slightly cupped with the thumb closed to index finger. This hand is placed on the lady's left shoulder blade with her lat in the palm of man's hand. The man's elbow should be relaxed and slightly lower than his hand. The lady's left hand should be gently placed on the top of man's right arm, not as high as the shoulder. Her hand is placed in a position that will allow her to release it in either direction (forward or back) without catching on man's arm. The lady should be making contact with her wrist and forearm to the man's arm without applying any pressure (if the man should drop his right arm, the lady's arm position should remain unchanged).

Man's left hand is holding the lady's right by cupping his hand slightly and allowing the lady's hand to hook over top. Man's left palm faces to the right (rather than up or down), and the lady's palm should face the floor. This connection is held low with both partners' arms relaxed.

Lesson note: It is at this time that I teach the men that, in any position, the hand that is closest to the lady's center is the most effective lead hand. In the point of closed position that hand would be his right. I demonstrate this by showing that with my hand in contact with the lady's body I am able to get an immediate reaction to a lead, while the reaction to the hand connected to her hand is dependent on her connection and following ability.

### **Open Facing Position**

The hand connection is essentially the middle and ring finger of the lady's right hand hooked around the middle and ring finger of the man's left hand. Again, the man's palm is facing his right and lady's palm is facing the floor. The pinky and index finger of both partners should be relaxed and closed to the rest of the hand, but they are not absorbing any pressure from the connection. It is important that these finger are not tense as they will tend to push the hand out of the connection altogether. The lady's hand should be deep enough into the man's hand that the outside of her pinky is in contact with the

man's palm. The thumb of both partners should be relaxed and uninvolved in the connection.

Lesson note: It is important to teach the men not to use their thumbs in the connection as it is a common habit to use it to secure the lady's hand into his. This will lead to many problems in the future. On the same note, the lady's can help avoid this problem by maintaining the hook with their middle and ring fingers. Ladies will often relax and thus straighten their fingers, which now requires the man to hold her hand into his. This is where the use of the thumb usually occurs. Yes, sometimes things are the lady's fault ☺ In the basic hand connection, the man's wrist should be relaxed so it breaks very slightly toward the floor. Imagine that a ball was rolled from the inside of the man's elbow. It should roll down and off the end of the man's thumb. This technique ensures that the lady's wrist remains flat and will absorb compression without any stress to the joint. If you are in a two hand hold, the man's right hand and the lady's left hand will mirror this connection.

### **Arm position**

When in an open facing position (which is typically the beginning and ending of every pattern), the arms should hang relaxed between the two partners. Imagine that the shoulders are trees and the connected arms are a hammock. The height of the hands is dependent on the distance of the partners. This theory helps to avoid the habit of holding the arms up and pulling in to create a connection. The gravitational pull of the hands away from each other is the beginning of the connection, which is then enhanced by the placement of the body weight.

### **Connection and Lead**

There are two types of connection, compression and leverage. Compression is the connection where the partners are pressing in toward one another. Leverage is the connection where the partners are pulling away. Both connections are achieved through movement not muscle. It is common for a dancer to understand what the connection is supposed to feel like and to try to "manufacture" the connection with a push or a pull through the arm. The correct way to achieve connection occurs through a sequence of events that begins with the movement of the man's body. When the lady's body is in motion and the man stops his body, his arm will then stop, causing the lady's arm to stop, which then stops her body. The only time a true connection is in place is when the man is asking the lady to stop, go, or change direction. As long as the lady is currently doing the desired action in the desired direction there will be hand contact but no connection. A great analogy to explain basic lead and connection (as in the case of a sugar push) is a train. The man is the engine and the lady is the caboose. When the engine moves there is a slight delay as the connection between the cars tightens causing the caboose to ultimately move. The same is true of the stop. The engine stops, all of the cars compress causing the caboose to stop by "running into" the engine. The lead on 1 of every pattern happens this way. It is the movement of the man's body that gets the lady moving forward, not the pull of his arm.

It is common as you start teaching compression and leverage that students will lean forward and back in effort to create this feeling. It was once an accepted style to have the lady sitting way back on the anchor. In any connection both partners should be upright

from hip to head adjusting their weight placement over their feet to achieve the appropriate connection, for example place the weight over the ball of the foot while compressing and slightly back over the heel for leverage. A good exercise is to have students stand up straight from hip to head and practice shifting their weight over one foot from toe to heel. They will be surprised that they get a pretty large range of motion without ever having to take a step or sacrifice their posture.

When working on connection, think of a scale of 0 through 10. 0 is touching your partner with no pressure and 10 is the maximum amount of pressure you use in any given partnership. This will vary from one partner to the next depending on strength and style. Every time a connection is made you will run the entire range of 0 to 10. This creates that soft elastic feel that is so unique to West Coast Swing. On a 6 count pattern, beat 4 should be at a 1 or 2 on the scale. As we dance our anchor step, we will gradually increase the tension until we hit 10 on the and before beat 1. Think of your connection as a breathing animal. If it holds it's breath for 2 beats of music it will die and we will have to start from scratch. If we continue to let the connection breathe, we will continue to increase or leverage until it's time for the next pattern and the lady will require very little lead to move. There are times that I will dance my anchor step moving slightly away from my partner to achieve this connection. That is not always necessary, but it is acceptable. The anchor step should never move forward toward the partner as that will destroy the connection.

Leading also uses a scale of 0 to 10. Don't confuse it with our connection scale because it is different. I subscribe to the theory that there is no such thing as too heavy of a lead. The discomfort that most ladies are feeling when they say this is due to an inconsistent lead. At no time should you jump more than two numbers on your scale. For example, if you are leading me at a 2 and all of a sudden you increase to an 8 it is too heavy. If you go from 6 to 8 it feels great. The lady is always responding to the pressure through your arm. If she feels a 2 she will relax slightly and she will not be prepared for the heavier lead making it uncomfortable. Consistency is key. This will avoid shoulder problems and other potential injuries for both partners. Men who surprise the lady with an abrupt change on the scale will often feel her respond with an abrupt change in tension in her arm. This is when the follow will feel heavy and labored. At the basic level, I teach men to stay between 3 and 6 using 5 as their normal. As a dancer progresses he will use more of the scale effectively for speed purposes, but that takes more experience.

I frequently am asked what a man should do when he is dancing with a lady who is heavy or will not follow. My answer is "Nothing differently than you do with a lady who does follow". What that means is that, regardless of the lady's response, the lead does not change, the way it feels changes. The way I demonstrate this to a student is by having them walk across the dance floor with me. I place my hand on the small of their back and guide them across the floor without telling them that I am demonstrating anything (sneaky huh?) They will walk with me and there will be no pressure between my hand and their back, just me touching them, a 1 on our scale of leading. I then tell them to stop walking. I continue and the pressure between my hand and their back increases to a 10 and they resume walking with me. I did nothing different when they stopped walking as I did when they were walking. It just felt different. This is a perfect representation of

leading. There are three parts to every lead; prep, lead, and follow through. The prep is the indication of what's to come as well as the setting up of the lady's body to execute the next movement. Sometimes it is as simple as the man's body rotating slightly to indicate what side the lady will pass him on. Preps get a bit more complicated in the upper levels. The lead is the obvious movement of the man's body to initiate the lady's movement in the desired direction. Sometimes it is just a step back as in the case of beat 1 of all of our basic patterns. Sometimes it is a movement of the hand as in the case of a spin. Follow through is continuing to move the lady's hand to the desired end of the movement. If a lady is following effectively, the follow through will be at a 1 or 2 on our scale. If the lady is not following well it may be at an 8 or 9. This is due to the lady not the man increasing pressure. The only thing a man should do different with ladies who are heavier in their follows is to choose patterns accordingly. This is not an issue at the basic level, but it is a good time to plant the seed. Pattern selection is the key to a good dance, and men should always choose patterns according to their partners capabilities.

## **The Dance Improvement Program Committee**

The Dance Improvement Program Committee consists of 4-6 ASDC members appointed by the Board of Directors and they serve at the pleasure of the Board. All members (except 1) of the Dance Improvement Program Committee must be members of the Practice Assistance Committee. The Dance Improvement Program Committee chair is elected by the committee members subject to approval by the Board of Directors.

The Committee's charge is to insure that the Dance Improvement Program is properly applied in the Club's lessons and in the Practice Assistance program. The committee will work with the Club's dance instructors and Practice Assistants in a systematic fashion to insure the Dance Improvement Program is implemented and maintained.

The Committee's duties include:

Continuing assessment of the Club's WCS Basic lessons to insure that the material taught is consistent with the Club's WCS Basics Manual and Companion video. This includes observation of the lessons and periodic and systematic feedback to the instructors in both written and oral form.

Continuing assessment of the Practice Assistance program to insure that the Club sponsored dance practice is consistent with the Club's WCS Basics Manual and Companion video.

Continuing assessment of the content of the Club's WCS Basics Manual and Companion video to insure that the content is appropriate for the Club's membership.

Receive suggestions for changes in the program from Dance Instructors and the Practice Assistants Committee.

The Dance Improvement Program was developed to apply good instructional design to the Club's instructional offerings. The main feature of the Program is specifying footwork for the basic patterns of WCS. The Club's instructors will teach these patterns and the PAs will practice with these patterns. We realize that there are several proper ways to execute any pattern and that dancers, as they advance, should learn more than one way to execute each basic pattern. Using one execution for each pattern removes confusion on the part of new learners. It is thus important that the execution taught by the instructors and practiced by the PAs match as closely as possible the execution presented in the Club's WCS Basics Manual and Companion video. Students tend to remember the 1% discrepancy rather than the 99% congruence.

Success of the Program depends on the collaboration of this Committee, the PA committee and the dance instructors. Information should flow freely among the three groups and the Committee should (through the Board of Directors) operate to provide the dance instructors and PAs with the resources needed to be successful.

Operational issues:

The Committee should provide feedback to an instructor within 3 days of a lesson. The feedback will be a conversation with the instructor followed by a written component and may include a meeting between committee members and the instructor. Communication is enhanced when the instructor provides a written response when a response is needed and the instructor should feel free to offer suggestions to the Committee.

The Committee will provide the PAs feedback from the dance instructors regarding their performance during lessons and elsewhere. The committee may assist PAs in self-evaluation. The PAs may request resources needed for self evaluation or additional training from the Board through the Committee.

Instructors are encouraged to use PA when appropriate. PAs could, for example, demonstrate patterns during lessons so all students can see a model as they practice a pattern. Also PAs may work with one group while the instructor is working with the other group when students are separate into leaders and followers for instructional purposes. PAs and instructors may propose other ways the PAs can enhance learning.

The Dance Improvement Program Committee and the PA Committee may work together to decide other operational procedures.