

What's the difference between East Coast Swing, West Coast Swing, and Lindy Hop Swing?

By Joe Baker (The Dance Store)

- **East Coast Swing**, also known as triple step swing, triple timing swing, and jitterbug, has a basic count of 1&2, 3&4, 5,6. Some folks describe the basic as "triple step, triple step, rock, step." It was the standard swing dance of 50's-era "sock hops." The music speed is 140-175 beats per minute. This dance has lilt (bounce) and energy. It is generally danced without strict regard to any particular orientation or geometry. It's easy to learn. When your parents talked about dancing the swing, this dance is probably what they were talking about.
- **West Coast Swing** is danced in a slot (a linear pattern) to slower music (generally 110-130 beats per minute). It's a smooth, often sexy dance, and it does not have lilt and bounce. West coast swing dancers consider their dance to be "cooler," more chic, more sophisticated, and less barbaric than east coast swing. West coast swing can be more difficult to learn because several foot patterns are required and the patterns may contain 6,8,and 10 or more counts. Common figures include 1) the push, 2) the left side pass, 3) the right side pass underarm turn, 4) tuck turn, 5) locked or "basket" whip, 6) regular whip, 7) back whip, and 8) reverse whip. West coast swing requires a very good sense of timing and connection.
- **Lindy Hop Swing** is the current rage with young people. Lindy hop swing can involve lots of kicks and aerials (lifts and flips). The dance uses six and eight count patterns. Common figures include the "swing out," and the Charleston step. Lindy hop dancers usually wear the black and white shoes and the guys might wear "Zoot Suits." I dance the Lindy hop but I do not offer Lindy Hop Swing tapes.

The Beginner's Mistakes in East Coast Swing

The biggest problem is taking steps that are too large. Keep the steps small, especially the "rock step." In addition, close the feet on the "and" of the triple step. East Coast Swing is danced almost exclusively on the balls of the feet and almost exclusively in third foot position. The "triple steps" should be taken by striking the floor with the inside edge of the ball of the foot. The triple steps are also a "digging" action as opposed to a "bouncing off the floor" action. As a triple step is taken to the left, the hips remain to the right. As a triple step is taken to the right, the hips switch to, and stay to, the left. In the "rock step," the spine stays in front of the "rocking" foot. The lilt comes from straightening the knee rather than from jumping. Lilt and energy are important. Also, do not over-extend the arms or jerk arms from their sockets. Keep the dance compact.

The Beginner's Mistakes in West Coast Swing

West Coast Swing requires an exceptional sense of timing and connection. Developing the "connection" may require many hours, perhaps years of practice. Almost all beginners rush the

beat and move forward automatically before the "one" beat. This often results from dancing a "coaster" step (that is, a back-together-forward step) on beats "5&6" rather than dancing an "anchor step," as should be danced. Developing the feel and the connection is difficult without private instruction. Another problem: too much bounce. West coast swing DOES NOT have the lilt of east coast swing. It's a much smoother dance than east coast swing