

**Got That Swing!**  
by Mary Manzella

This month we begin a series of articles intended to increase your awareness of techniques that have become a part of West Coast Swing dancing. Adopting these ideas will increase your level of proficiency, give you more confidence on the dance floor, and allow you to have more fun. This month we'll discuss an important change that has taken place in the way we connect to the timing of the music. It puts the swing in West Coast Swing.

When I first learned West Coast Swing, I learned to dance my basic patterns to the timing 1 2, 3&4, 5&6. This means that when I danced my triple steps—the 3&4's and 5&6's—I stepped on the "&" count and the triple steps were evenly spaced. Musicians call this count Straight Count. This count produces a marching effect in swing dancing.

I have since adopted a technique, discovered and developed by Skippy Blair, called Rolling Count. Skippy Blair is known as The Teacher's Teacher and many of the champion dancers, including Mary Ann Nuñez, Wayne & Sharlot Bott, and Jordan Frisbee & Tatiana Mollmann, subscribe to the Universal Unit System<sup>®</sup> and the Rolling Count. If it's good enough for them; it's good enough for me!

The Rolling Count (for a 6 Beat pattern) is: &a1 &a2 - &a3 &a4 - &a5 &a6. However, the easiest way to experience the feeling of a Rolling Count, is to dance Triples in place, to a nice slow, comfortable piece of music, counting in sets of eight. If you really listen to swing music, you will be able to count that Rolling Count. You will begin to feel that the triples are not evenly spaced. They are syncopated. This means that the rhythm is uneven. You will be able to step on the Left foot on count "1"- hold the "&" count and step twice on "a 2" - Now, step on the Right foot on count "3" hold the "&" count and step twice on "a 4" - The verbal call for this count is: "Step hold, step-step" - & a "Step hold, step-step". Don't just read it - get up and do it. Continue repeating these Left and Right Triples until you start feeling the difference. This count allows you to center over one foot and then the other and develops a swinging motion. This count adds a new dimension to any form of swing - but particularly West Coast Swing! As the song reminds us, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."

When I count the Rolling Count for my students, I can see more fluid movement in their bodies. Their bodies look more like swing as they move to the cadence of the Rolling Count. Try it again, but this time dance any six count pattern: Count &a1 &a2, &a3 &a4, &a5 &a6. Soon, you will start "feeling the swing" in every swing pattern.

Many natural dancers dance Rolling Count automatically because their instincts make them move to this three dimensional count - rather than the two dimensional Straight Count. Being able to apply the Rolling Count to your dancing will make your dancing come alive and you will feel more connected with the music. The patterns that you do will not change. Only the musical execution of the patterns change.

A good way to experience the differences in Rolling Count and Straight Count is to participate in Motion Study classes or Rhythmic Drill classes. There are several teachers here in San Diego who can assist you with this concept of timing.

Remember this is only for dancers who want to make a change in their dancing. If you've been dancing for years and you are happy with your own style, there is no need to change now. Continue to have fun but support the up-and-coming dancers of our club who will want to learn Rolling Count.

Can one person dancing Straight Count and one dancing Rolling Count dance together? Absolutely! Life is progress and progress is change. All types of dancing continue to change. In Cha-Cha we used to "Break on One", and now we "Break on Two". West Coast Swing, like every other dance, is constantly evolving.

From experience, I know that the more you learn about dancing, the more fun you have with your dancing.

Love, Mary