**TECHNIQUE WORKSHOP – CHA CHA CHA**

**POISE**

* Dancing is a language without words, good poise is crucial to communicating with your partner.
* You have to train your body to get your posture right – think about it every time you start to dance.
* Get your blocks in a straight line – your head, shoulders and hips in line with your feet.
* Stand with your weight over one foot with the knee of the supporting leg straight and locked back – feel your pelvis move sideways and back with the weight near the heel of that foot – your upper body should not be affected.
* Lift and support your ribcage, remembering to breathe through your diaphragm.
* Relax your shoulders so they are back and down.
* Make your neck long - don't tilt your chin up, stretch up through the centre of your head.
* Don’t look at the dance floor – when you drop your head it throws both of you off balance.

**CLOSE HOLD – RUMBA/CHA CHA CHA/BOSSA NOVA**

* Your arms and hands should have tone – just a slight resistance - to connect to your partner.
* Never interlink your fingers with your partner – it can be dangerous on turns and if you slip.
* In close hold make sure that you are about 15cm apart and positioned slightly to your partner’s right side so your feet and bodies are offset – this facilitates moving together.
* Don’t raise your shoulders when you move into close hold.
* Make sure you connect with each other through your joined palms – just slight resistance – and close the fingers around your partner’s hand but don’t squeeze!
* Make sure your joined hands are on an invisible line central to both of you – it helps your balance – and that the joined hands are at Follower’s nose/ear height.
* The Leader’s left wrist is straight and the Follower’s right slightly bent to receive the lead.
* In Latin dance, Leaders use both their left and right hands/arms to indicate a lead.
* The Leader’s right hand cups the bottom of the Follower’s left shoulder blade so the lead can be felt – don’t dig and don’t make “banana” hands on your partner’s back – group fingers neatly.
* The Leader’s right hand/fingers shouldn’t cross the spine of the Follower – it’s uncomfortable for the Follower.
* Leaders’ elbows should be level for better balance.
* Followers shouldn’t grab at Leaders with their left hand or form a “claw” on the shoulder – just group fingers neatly on top of the Leader’s shoulder – you connect better and it looks good.
* Followers mustn’t rest their arms on the Leader – they are not a coat hanger and arms are heavy.
* Leaders should allow close hold to breathe forwards when dancing a checked forward walk (forward basic) as the Follower dances a backward walk (back basic) – the 2 actions aren’t quite the same.

**OTHER HANDHOLDS – FREE ARMS**

* If in open position or offering one hand, Leaders offer their hand palm up and Followers palm down – keep the hands open and don’t grip tightly.
* When moving into New Yorks and Hand to Hands, ensure the leading arm is taken forward.
* When the Leader’s left arm is raised to indicate a turn then the joined hands should be palm to palm and the Follower’s hand should rotate in the Leader’s hand.
* Free arms never dangle – typically they are to the side extended or retracted.
* The hands of free arms face down to the floor or away from the body if a high armline.

**TIMING – MUSIC**

* Count 4 beats to a bar i.e. 1234, 1234.
* The musical accent or down beat is on beats 1 and 3, but there are percussive accents (e.g. a snare drum) on beats 2 and 4.
* For most figures we dance using the same rhythm: the rhythmic building block is Slow Slow Quick Quick Slow (quick = ½ beat and slow = 1 beat) but we usually count 2 3 Cha Cha Cha or 2 3 4&1.
* To start dancing, move sideways on beat 4 into Cha Cha Cha Chasse OR on beat 1 into a single side step.

**MOVEMENT & FOOTWORK**

* Control is the essence - don’t slap your feet into place. Latin walks slide!
* The upper body starts moving slightly ahead of legs and feet – that’s normal for walking.
* Moving forward, use the toe then the ball of the foot with pressure into the floor before lowering your heel – you will flex your ankle and knee then the leg straightens and takes your weight.
* Moving backward, use the ball then the toe of the foot with pressure into the floor before lowering your heel – you will flex your ankle and knee then the leg straightens and takes your weight.
* Don’t pick up your feet: both feet (big toe really) remain in contact with the floor at all times.

**CHECKED FORWARD WALK (e.g. forward basic or New York)**

* The stepping foot moves in advance of the body because you’re NOT moving forward on the next step.
* When you step forward not all your weight will be on the front foot, some will remain on the back foot and the back knee will flex.
* Your full body weight settles for the last part of the beat onto the supporting foot – that’s less than half a beat.
* The toe of your stepping foot (the front one) should turn out about 1/16th – this will put your hip in the right position and you should feel the weight under your heel.

**BACKWARD WALK (e.g. back basic)**

* When you step backward all your weight will be on the back foot, ensure you lower your heel to the floor and straighten your knee, allowing your pelvis to move, and feel the weight under your heel.
* Your front foot will not have any weight on it and the front leg will be held with some tension – release the front heel from the floor slightly and ensure the knee is straight.
* Your full body weight settles for the last part of the beat onto the supporting foot – that’s less than half a beat.
* The toe of your stepping foot (the back one) will turn out naturally about 1/16th – we call this inherent turn and it will aid your balance.

**CHA CHA CHA CHASSE**

* A chasse is a group of 3 steps taken in any direction or danced almost in place.
* The moving foot half closes to the stationary foot on the second step. When moving forwards or backwards use a locking (or crossing) action on step 2, although social dancers may use a simple chasse.
* When moving sideways: on the first step compress the knee of the moving foot with hips starting to move in that direction, on the second step both knees are compressed with the hips central, on the third step both knees are straight with the hips fully over to the direction of movement. Footwork throughout is ball flat.
* When moving forwards: on the first step the knee of the moving foot is straight with hips starting to move in that direction and the shoulder of the moving foot leading, on the second step both knees are compressed (in a Latin cross position) with the hips central, on the third step both knees are straight with the hips fully over to the direction of movement and the shoulder of the moving foot leading. Footwork is ball flat on steps 1 and 3 but toe on step 2.
* When moving backwards: on the first step the knee of the moving foot is straight with hips starting to move in that direction and the toe turned out with the shoulder of the moving foot leading, on the second step both knees are compressed (in a Latin cross position) with the hips central, on the third step both knees are straight with the hips fully over to the direction of movement and the shoulder of the moving foot leading. Footwork is ball flat on steps 2 and 3 but toe on step 1.

**SPOT TURN / UNDERARM TURN**

* Keep both feet in contact with the floor at all times – do not spin on one leg!
* Use a forward walk turning on the first step, i.e. dance a normal forward walk but with a gradual turn in it.
* Turn a ¼ on step 1, ½ on step 2 and ¼ over steps 3 4 5 to finish facing your partner again.
* Keep your head level or spot (hold the head for as long as possible and then bring it around rapidly) on turns, as this will help your balance.
* Ensure the lead is given at the appropriate time.

**FLOORCRAFT**

* When dancing a spot dance, try not to encroach on other dancers' space.
* Be flexible about your hold when you have to – if you’re going to elbow another couple then drop your arms a bit or don’t extend your free arm as far.