



Edinburgh University Swing Dance
Society notes on:



Charleston: 1) basics

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The Charleston is *the* dance of the “roaring 20s”. It can be danced disconnected from your partner, or partnered up (see our notes on “partnered Charleston”). The basic has two main components; the steps and the ‘ankle flaps’. The ankle flaps are optional, but they do give a real ‘20s feel.

Basic rhythm

Begin by standing upright but with slightly bent knees, weight on the balls of your feet.

- 1 – tap the toes of your R foot in front of you.
- 2 – raise your R foot off the ground and start bringing it back
- 3 – step on to your right foot behind you, committing your weight
- 4 – raise your L foot off the ground and start bringing it back
- 5 – tap the toes of your L foot behind you
- 6 – raise your left foot and start bringing it forwards
- 7 – step on to your left foot a little in front of you, committing the weight
- 8 – raise your R foot and start bringing it forwards.

The simplest way of calling the rhythm is “tap – step – tap –step”

Dancing on “the diagonal”

The Charleston is not (should not be) danced straight forwards, but on a diagonal. On beat 1, tap your R foot across slightly so it is almost in front of your L foot, and on beat 5 cross your L foot behind you slightly so that it is almost behind your R foot. This creates a feel of dancing on a slight diagonal: show-girls, in particular, danced this way.

Arms

Let them swing in opposition to the feet (so when the R foot crosses to tap on the left side of the body, on 1, the arms swing across the body to the right).

Becoming “leggi-dextrous”

Both sexes should learn the Charleston in the form above and also in its mirror image (start by tapping the left leg to the front): this is especially important if you want to do partnered Charleston.

Ankle flaps

The rule is simple: when you are stepping or tapping (odd numbered beats), both ankles are inwards. On even numbered beats, the ankles point outwards. Most people find this hard at first. Practice doing the ankle flaps on their own, first (keep a good bounce in your body so that you don’t strain them), without stepping anywhere. Then do a sugar-foot-walk, which means walking forwards on one leg then the other, stepping on beats 1,3,5,7 etc, with the ankle flapping going on all the time (ankles inwards when you step, outwards between steps). Then, when you are comfortable with this, incorporate the ankle flaps into the Charleston itself. Be patient with yourself – almost everybody finds this tough at first.

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