



The Swing Doctors' notes on:

# Laminu

## 1) the basic



Please see <http://www.swingdoctors.org.uk> for updates.

*Copyright © 2011, Jamie Davies and Katie Brooks. Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.3; with the Invariant Sections (which must not be modified or deleted) being the logos, header and URL above, and this entire copyright paragraph.*

History: the origins of the laminu (sometimes spelt 'lamamu') seem to be shrouded in mystery. Clearly, it arose in California in the late 1940s, and was most probably conceived by dancers who were already dancing the Balboa (given the similarities of the two dances). Theories of its name vary, but one promising lead has been provided by Ray Cunningham, an old time laminu dancer, who found an advertisement for a dance, in the correct area and era, being held by a college fraternity association called 'λν' (the Greek letters are pronounced 'lambda-nu'). Laminu and the 'slow Balboa' that appears at some Bal workshops are clearly similar: if you are a Balboa dancer, please see our notes at the end of this sheet for comments on the differences.

Before you start the 'basic': We first learned elements of Laminu in classes taught by Sylvia Sykes and Dean Raftery, and by Sylvia Sykes and Ray Cunningham (the Laminu styling from the latter especially). They emphasized that there was no real 'basic' - the stance is too improvised for that - but they created two 'basic moves' to teach the core elements of the dance, which can then be combined flexibly. We have shamelessly stolen this idea for our classes and notes.

### The basic rhythm

The basic rhythm is step, step, triple step, step, step, triple step. This can be fitted into the music in two ways. For really slow music, you would use the 1-2-3&4-5-6-7&8 pattern familiar to Lindy Hoppers. For slow to mid-tempo music, you can 'halve the speed' to follow 1-3-567-1-3-567; ie slow-slow-quick-quick-slow; slow-slow-quick-quick-slow. In both cases, though, you can 'swing' the timing, and the triples, especially, need not be metronomic.

### Hold and 'look'

Similar to Balboa; solid core, loose limbs, weight biased to the on the front of the foot, contact between the centre of the follower's chest and a point about half way between the centre of the leader's chest and the side (female-female partnerships can work out their own solution to the tessellation problem). Arms are in a soft ballroom-style hold but the lead mostly comes via the chest and arm frame matters only in some variations. The look is intimate (not performance).

### BASIC ONE(written with the first example of timing above)

- 1 – leader steps directly back on left, drawing lady to step forwards
- 2 – leader steps forwards again on R, leading lady to step backwards
- 3- leader steps fwd with left foot, changing weight on to it
- & - leader opens to R with R, committing weight\*
- 4 – leader closes L to R, committing weight. The follower follows this chasse
- 5 – leader steps to R on R, turning his shoulders about 45 deg clockwise as he does so. This leads the follower to step out too, and to follow this sway of the body so that she is facing 45 deg-ish to the line she was facing before. Relax into the floor a bit.
- 6 – leader transfers weight back to left foot, and starts to remove the body turn.
- 7 – leader steps back on R
- & - leader opens with L\*
- 8 – leader closes R to L.

\* - don't 'cut the corner' with this leg: instead take it to the standing leg then out to the side.

### Common problems

- Big steps (keep them small)
- Delayed leads (make sure that you bring the lady with you as soon as you move on 1, not move first then bounce her into you).
- 'Blurring' directions: 1-2 is South-North; 3&4 is East; 5-6 is East (man) or a little North East (lady); 7&8 is pure West (not 'blurring' into the South of the next beat 1). When you have the basic working well, by all means rotate and change it, but get it working with perfect directions before you consciously vary them (rather than just fudge the issue all the time!).

### **BASIC TWO (box basic)**

- 1 – Leader steps left on L foot
- 2 – Leader closes R to L.
- 3 – Leader steps fwd on L
- & - Leader closes R to L and steps on it
- 4 – Leader steps fwd on L
- 5 - Leader steps right on R
- 6 – Leader closes L to R, transferring weight
- 7 – Leader steps back on R
- & - Leader closes L to R and steps on it
- 8 – Leader steps back on R.

Dancers will note that these basics can alternate very smoothly, because of where the momentum lies at the end of each.

Practice the basics a lot before throwing in variations.

### **Differences between Laminu and 'Slow Bal'**

There are two main differences between Laminu and 'Slow Bal' that show up even in these basic patterns. The primary difference is that Slow Bal, like Balboa itself, usually has a step-close action on the 1,2 (when the leader is stepping back on his left foot), and the change of direction is led by the subtle 'controlled topple' of Balboa on the 3-4. Laminu, on the other hand, has a definite back-forward change of direction between 1 and 2 in the first basic. This means that the motion of 3-4 is driven by the leader being forward from the very beginning. The second difference, which shows up more in the second basic, is that whereas triple steps in triple time balboa, and Hollywood-style Lindy hop, tend to leave the trailing foot in place when it takes the weight in the '&' of a 3&4 or 7&8, in Laminu this foot catches up the leading foot. This makes for more forward or backward motion in the Laminu triples, and means that more floor is covered.

A broader difference, which will show up only beyond the basic level, is that Laminu is usually danced with more rotational moves than is Slow Bal.

***To make suggestions or to request up-to-date copies, e-mail [laminu@swingdoctors.org.uk](mailto:laminu@swingdoctors.org.uk)***