



Edinburgh University Swing Dance
Society notes on:



Lindy Hop: 4) The Texas Tommy and breakaway steps

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These notes assume that you are already confident with the basic rhythm and with the swingout from side by side and from facing (see Lindy notes sheets 1-3).

General remarks

The “Texas Tommy” (aka Apache, arm breaker) is a useful figure – essentially a modified swingout - that swaps a left-right hold to a right-right hold. It is also useful as a launch-point for breakaway steps. There are several different ways to do the Texas Tommy; the easiest is the 180° one, described first.

The 180 degree Texas Tommy from Facing

Begin facing, man's left hand to lady's right (as after a swingout, for example). You must have the loose hold (no grips) for this move. Beats 1,2 are exactly like a normal swingout (man rock-step, lady twist-twist). On 3,4, as the lady comes in, the man needs to reach his right hand round the lady's left side and, as he does it, to take the lady's right arm (the one he is holding) *down first* then round into a half-Nelson position, transferring her hand onto his right hand. The natural swingout-like rotation of this will mean that, by the time the hand is transferred on beat 4, the man is slightly beyond the lady, having turned about 90 degrees to the right. On 5,6, the man gently leads the lady's hand downwards behind her back, which will encourage her to turn to unwind herself. The turn is finished on the triple step, by which time the partners should have changed places compared to their starting position. The move leaves the partners in an R-R hold, but if the man does not want this, he can just place the lady's hand back into his L hand, and be in the conventional hold.

Common problems:

- The lady's right hand gets trapped around beat 4: the lady should never let any 'free' hand just dangle, but rather she should hold her free hand at elbow height (like the connected hand). This is a general point about swing dancing, not just about this move.
- The lady's elbow hurts: the man must lower her hand first. Gently play with the lady's elbow and figure out the way the hinge works before trying the move again.
- Someone's wrist hurts: someone is gripping. Don't. It does not matter if you lose touch while learning this – it will teach you something, and no harm is done. It does matter if you grip because you are scared of losing touch, and someone gets hurt.
- The lady and man do not change places. This happens because the initial coming in and half-rotation on 3-4 is failing. Dance some ordinary swingouts, and get the feel of those beats, then go back to the Texas Tommy and keep that feel.

The 'fast' 180 degree Texas Tommy from facing

The first four beats of this are precisely as above. The 5,6 is similar, but the unwinding of the lady is faster, driven by a faster guidance of her hand downwards behind her back (please note the word 'guidance' – not yanking!). On the & after 6, the guy should hop off his foot to land on 7, facing the lady, in a 'frog' position (legs apart, weight centred, in a deep get-down). By taking his

R hand down with him, the man effectively applies a 'handbrake' to the lady, encouraging her into a frog position. Be careful not to pull the lady down or forwards, or she will head-butt you and it will all be your fault.... The point of this variation is that it creates a 'STOP' in the dance. You can, for example, part at this point and do jazz steps, in a **breakaway** (see below).

Common problems:

- The lady fails to frog or stop: the man is not guiding her hand down far enough (or early enough)
- The lady pitches forwards: the man is yanking her hand down too far/fast. Guide, don't pull!

Typical Breakaway steps

You can do anything you like, of course. A good combination for beginners is a boogie back, boogie forward, boogie back, boogie forward (and reconnect for a conventional swingout). You can find an explanation of these moves in our notes on the Shim Sham. The tricky thing for the man is to start these off on beat 8 (most breakaway steps do start on 8) – he needs to remember that his frog lasts only 1 beat before he is off again. The tricky thing for the lady is to work out what is happening. It does not matter at all if she misses the first boogie back (or whatever). Tip for Ladies: do not panic and try to catch on as quickly as possible. Hold your frog pose for as long as you like, and join in when you know what is happening. To observers, it will look as if you are doing a clever call and response, and not at all like a mistake or failure to catch on.

The 360 degree Texas Tommy from Facing

This is more obviously a variation on a swingout, and to purists it is the 'proper' Texas Tommy. It begins as a standard swingout from facing, but on beat 4 the man starts to feed the lady's hand *down first* and then into a half Nelson. In a fluid movement across 4 and 5, he does this, changes the hands, and starts to lead the lady to turn out. The turn is completed in the triple on beats 7,8. This version is fluid and does not create any kind of 'stop' feel.

Common problems (this section assumes you can do the 180 degree form well):

- The lady gets stuck in a big tangle on 5,6; the man needs to leave space, and to keep her moving in the usual motion of a swingout.
- The lady spins out wildly: the man is giving her too much momentum

The Texas Tommy from side-by-side

As noted above, the Texas Tommy is essentially a swingout variation and, like almost all variations on the swingout, it can be done from side-by-side as well as from facing.

Start side by side. Beats 1,2 are done as for a normal swingout. On 3,4, the man goes round as for a normal swingout, but stays closer and takes the lady's left hand down and round her so that, by the end of beat 4, she is in a half-Nelson and he has, for an instant, both hands on her hand behind her back. On 5, he must lead her forward and *only then*, when she is moving forward, complete the hand transfer and unwind her (she will turn along her 'slot').

Common problems:

- Lady turns on spot: the man is leading the unwind before leading her forwards.
- Lady turns out on some crazy diagonal: the man is changing hands too early, so that only his right hand tries to lead her forward movement.
- The man gets tangled in the lady's bust: if the lady is.. erm... generously proportioned, the man needs to face away over his left shoulder a little around beat 4, or he risks a complicated nose/cleavage situation that is unlikely to end well....

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