



Edinburgh University Swing Dance Society notes on:



The Madison

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History: Originated in late 1950s in Cleveland, but became a fad in 1960s Baltimore. Originally quite variable and danced to generic music, it became a "set piece" when the Ray Bryant Combo released the special tune "Madison Time". In this, calls are made for a choreography first designed by Eddie Morrison, who was a Baltimore disc jockey who started calling these steps live on the air. The 1988 John Waters movie "Hairspray" depicts the Madison (with a few slight variations) and it is also mentioned, but not danced, in The Rocky Horror Picture Show.

General pattern: Everyone in a big line: to give orientation think of a compass - if the line runs West-East, then each person faces diagonally to the North East, and "forward" means North. Once the thing starts, two beats after the first "Hit it!" begins to be called, the pattern is repetition of the basic (see below) except when the caller asks for something else, which he will name and then say "hit it". Beware of the timing in this piece: the basic is a 6-count, so crosses the (8-count) music anyway and the specials are all sort of lengths. It is rare for anything in this piece to begin on beat 1 of an 8. The orientations on this page are the international standard, but for some reason people do it in mirror image in Glasgow (really!).

The Golden Rule: **The caller always says "Hit it! two beats before you actually hit it** (ie on the "tap tap tap" of the basic). If this is not true at any time, you have done something wrong! Whenever you hear "hit it!", finish the current basic before you go into the named 'special'.

Overall plan: 7 basics, 2-up-2-back big strong turn, 4 basics, 2-up-2-back-doublecross-rifleman, 4 basics, M, 3 basics, tea-time, 6 basics, Cleveland box, 5 basics, basketball, 4 basics, Jackie Gleason, 3 basics, birdland, 3 basics, 2-up-2-back-doublecross & freeze.

The basic: 6 count, overall rhythm is step-tap-step-tap-tap-tap. In detail, step fwd on left, tap R behind it and clap, step back on R, cross L (tap), uncross L (tap), cross L (tap). Arms are out at shoulder height on the tap-tap-tap, and rock to keep balance.

2-up-2-back-big strong turn (16bts in all). The 2-up-2-back gets used a lot in this dance. Step forward ("North") L, slide R to catch up, step fwd L, slide R to catch up but no weight & turn 90 deg to R, step back ("South") R, slide L to catch up, step back R, slide L to catch up but no weight: one beat each step or slide so the thing takes 8 beats. For the big strong turn, face East and step heavily North on L (2bts), pivot a/cw on L and step out further North on R (2bts), return your weight to your L leg (2bts), pivot again on your L and step South with your R (2bts). Then step North on your L which is the first step of the next basic.

2-up-2-back-doublecross-rifleman (22bts in all). Do the 2-up-2-back as before. For the doublecross, walk forward crossing L over R, R over L, L over R, R over L (2bts each step). Then crouch down to pick up your "rifle" (2bts), get up and stamp to fire it (2 bts). **Then step back on L and back on R - just 1 beat each.**

Big M (32 bts). Do the 2-up (see above) to North. Turn a bit to your R and do the 2-back to South East. Do another 2-up to North East, then a 2-back to South. This will have traced an "M" {and the horn player will come in on the last leg if you are on time}. Then "erase" your M by retracing your steps in a similar manner.

Tea-time (10bts). Just a variation inserted into the middle of a 2-up-2-back. 2-up as above. Jump out legs apart and arms outstretched horizontally (to make the T) - just 1 beat, then jump back in (just 1 beat), then do 2-back as above.

Cleveland Box (16bts). All the time you do this, "twiddle" your arms (like twiddling your thumbs, but with your whole arms which are folded loosely in front of you - it is a parody of boxing). Each step has 2 beats, and you visit corners of a square 'box'. Step L foot diag forward left and get down low. Close R foot hard behind it, transferring weight, & stand up. Step fwd with L foot, down low. Step out to right with R foot - stay low. Close L foot hard behind it, transferring weight, and stand up. Step back on R foot and get down low. Step out to left on L foot, stay low. Close R foot to it, transferring weight, and get up. Useful rule: you are low whenever you part your legs, and you get up whenever you close them.



Basketball (12bts): 2-up as before (4bts in all). Jump anticlockwise and mime putting a basketball in the hoop (2bts). Jump back round again clockwise (2bts). 2-back as before, holding your fingers in a (polite) Churchillian salute and mime saying "Two points" (when the caller says it - as you are going back). Wilt Chamberlain was one of the USA's most famous basketball players, by the way – played for the Harlem Globetrotters.

Jackie Gleason (10bts): 2-up as before (4bts in all). Kick R leg forward in air (1bt), cross it back over in front of your L leg without touching floor (1bt), kick it forward again and drop on to it (2bts). As you do these kicks, hold your hands as if holding a shovel and sing the shovel as if throwing coal off it into a fire (see pic). **Step back L (1bt) step back R (1bt).** If you are wondering, Jackie Gleason was a comedian and had a catch phrase, now inscribed on his tombstone, "and away we go", accompanied by this gesture. The dance parodies this, and the caller calls out the catchphrase. It has nothing whatever to do with baseball – that is a misunderstanding that seems to have arisen in London in the late 1980s.



Birdland (26beats): This is freestyle - walk about flapping and pecking like a bird. The "How about a little stiff-leg" called by the caller suggests chickens (to me, anyway). Be prepared to be in a big line again at the end.

2-up-2-back-doublecross-hold-it-right-there. This is just like the Rifleman, but in stead of picking up the gun you hold a pose. In London and Edinburgh, people tend to turn into their final pose (ie deal with your crossed legs by turning gently on the spot to unwind them).

*Comments/ Corrections to jamie.davies@ed.ac.uk
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