



Edinburgh University Swing Dance  
Society notes on:



# Collegiate Shag:

## 1) basics

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The Collegiate Shag is particularly appropriate for a University Swing dance group, being prominent in Ivy League Universities in the USA during the '20s and '30s, and also being danced in many other places in the North-Eastern United States. It is very different from Carolina Shag ("beach shag") and also from St Louis shag. Collegiate shag pre-dates swing music, and can be danced to rag-time as well as swing. Its history and nomenclature are complicated – please see our other note sheet for more info.

*There are various styles of Collegiate Shag, probably all 'correct' (ie danced that way somewhere in the first age of swing). We teach a style that has most turns and leads on the quick-quick. If you are learning a style that has them on the first 'slow', these notes will probably confuse you.*

**Stance:** loose-legged, some forward lean – the overall look is slightly goofy.

**Rhythm:** The basic rhythm of shag is 6-count (although there are 8-count figures).

Leaders:

- 1 – step on left foot, and flick right foot out diagonally behind you.
- 2 – "bounce" on left foot (not like a pogo stick, but enough to keep the pulse of the body going)
- 3 – step on right foot, flicking left foot out diagonally behind you.
- 4 – "bounce" on right foot.
- 5 – step on left foot, flicking right out diagonally behind you a little
- 6 – step on right foot, flicking left foot out diagonally behind out.

Followers: mirror image of above.

**Hold:** The basic is done in a close hold. The partners make contact at their chests, the lady's sternum meeting the right hand side of the man's chest so that they are not quite facing each other, but at a slight 'v' (like Balboa). The partners have a slight forward lean so that their legs have space (unlike Balboa). The man's right arm goes round the lady's back, her right arm rests on his shoulder, and the other arm is characteristically held rather high (much higher than it would be in Ballroom). *Note: some people dance even the basic in a more open hold.*

### Common problems

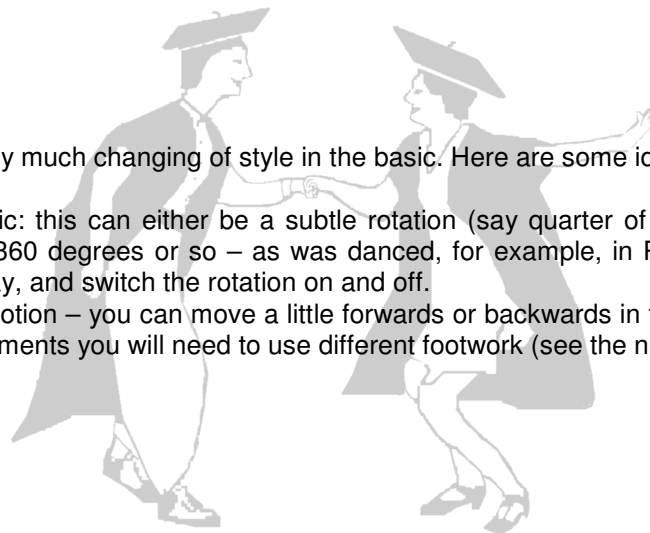
- Getting confused about which leg to use: this is almost always caused by people thinking about their flicking, decorative, leg rather than the one on which they are stepping. If you concentrate on your stepping leg, you are in the same pattern that you would be in any other 6-beat swing dance.

- Rocking from side to side: Shag does not involve any side to side rock. This is usually caused by over straight knees or exaggerated flocking of legs. Practice in front of a mirror, on your own, until you do not rock any more.
- Pogo-ing up and down. Again, practice in front of a mirror and concentrate on using your knees and ankles to absorb excess bounce so that your body has only a gentle pulse (no more than it has when you walk normally).
- Relative up-and-down motion between partners. This is often painful for the lady, so it does need to be sorted out. It may happen because you are out of beat with one another (chant out loud), because one of you is pogo-ing (see above), or because you are not clamped to one another tightly enough. Ladies blessed with a fuller figure will find that supportive clothing improves comfort and connection with your partner.
- Moving forwards or backwards. Unless you want to move it for some reason, the basic stays in one place (though it can rotate). If it is moving, one of you is probably leaning against the other too hard. Each of you ought to support your own weight.
- Lady's right arm or shoulder aches afterwards: the leader was probably holding it too high.

### Changes of style

Shag is characterised by much changing of style in the basic. Here are some ideas:

- Rotate the basic: this can either be a subtle rotation (say quarter of a turn) or a much greater turn – 360 degrees or so – as was danced, for example, in Princeton. You can rotate either way, and switch the rotation on and off.
- Gentle linear motion – you can move a little forwards or backwards in the basic, although for larger movements you will need to use different footwork (see the next lesson).



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