

Spiral Turns

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A spiral is an attractive turning action that can be used to create a substantial amount of rotation. This turn is typically

danced by the lady in dances such as rumba and cha cha. It is a highly stylized movement that is normally taken from a forward progressive walk. The spiral is frequently incorporated into various figures where large amounts of turn are required.

Spiral turns are very challenging to dance cleanly, as they require good body tone, balance and technique. This turn commences from a forward walk, turning on the ball of one foot and ends on the same foot with legs loosely crossed. Spirals can be integrated into figures that require more than $\frac{3}{8}$ rotation. There are figures that incorporate three $\frac{1}{2}$ turn pivot turns for a total rotation of $1\frac{1}{2}$ turns. This same amount of rotation can be achieved by dancing a spiral turn plus one pivot turn. This eliminates the need for two of the three pivots in this example. The minimum amount of turn for a spiral is slightly more than $\frac{3}{8}$ rotation. This is known as a loose spiral. The more typical amount of turn is $\frac{7}{8}$ rotation. There are double and a triple spirals covering $1\frac{7}{8}$ and $2\frac{7}{8}$ rotations respectively, however these are much more difficult to



achieve and are usually only seen in competitive dancing. The amount of turn is referenced from the beginning of the spiral to the beginning of the next forward walk. A spiral should always be under-turned by $\frac{1}{8}$ turn to allow the body's built up momentum to continue smoothly into the next forward step. In doing so, the body can then smoothly rotate an additional $\frac{1}{8}$ turn after exiting the spiral for a total of one complete revolution.

The following are helpful guidelines for dancing a spiral action. Start by placing most of your weight over the forward foot. The turn starts and ends on this foot. The turning foot is placed forward and slightly across the mid-line of the back foot. It is helpful to maintain a little pressure through the back foot, as this will provide stability throughout the turn. The pressure on the back foot needs to gradually soften near the end of the turn. In this manner, balance is established over two feet with a varying distribution of weight throughout the turn.

It is important to pull the abdominal muscles inward in order to fully engage the core of the body. As weight is moved over the ball of the turning foot, from a forward walk, both legs are squeezed together. This will initiate the turning action to create approximately $\frac{3}{8}$ rotation. The turn continues for an additional $\frac{1}{2}$ turn. The latter part of the turn is the actual spiral action. The legs cross at the end of the turn. The knee of the free leg should have a soft bend as it crosses in front of the standing leg. At the end of the turn, the trailing foot is loosely wrapped in front of the ankle of the standing leg with toes pointing down into the floor.

One of the most critical aspects of a spiral turn is managing inertia. Bear in mind that an object that is in motion tends to stay in

motion. At the end of the turn, there must be a follow action such as a forward walk or a pivot turn for example. The step that directly follows a spiral is especially critical as it is needed to redirect built up inertia from the spiral turn. If this step is not implemented correctly, it may result in an off-balance condition that will create a choppy transition into the next step. It is also important for the arms to be close to the body when dancing a spiral action. There is a tendency for some dancers to use their arms to propel their body into the turn. The excess inertia generated by this action requires a counterbalancing force to offset its effects. Once excessive inertia is created, it can make entry into the next step more difficult. This affects the smoothness of the action and creates discontinuity in the expression of the rhythm.

Spiral turns are very challenging as they require a lot of practice in order to achieve a clean turning action. They require good body tone especially at the body's central core, as well as good dynamic balance. While spirals are challenging, it is worth the extra effort as it will ultimately result in a highly stylized action that when danced correctly will add glamor to your routine.

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