

SHORTHAND DANCE NOTATION

Explanation of the Codes by Jack Steel (jsidx@hotmail.com)

with additions (Shown In Colour) by Miron Goldwaser (mironfun@gmail.com)

Shorthand notation for female role and notation for hands used and stance of partners

Preface

The Shorthand Dance Notation Code has been developed to record dance steps in real time as they are taught in a class or workshop. Its main purpose is to show at a glance, all the steps of a dance, and to serve as an efficient and convenient way to review a forgotten dance. More than 1000 dances have been coded. The shorthand notation does not record hand movements for circle dances. For most partner dances, only the male role in the dance is recorded. If the female role and other refinements are included they are shown in colour in both this legend and the actual code.

1. Introduction

A dance has a number of main elements that are coded. These are:

- The actual steps that describe the movement of the feet.
- The specification of the direction of movement.
- The beats and tempo associated with the steps.
- The various repetitions that occur within a dance, often with some variations.

1.1 Direction of Orientation (facing direction) and Direction of Movement

Absolute direction is specified with reference to the circle as viewed from above. The main directions are **in** or **out** of the circle along a radial line, indicated by **i** or **o**, and **clockwise** or **anti-clockwise** along the circumference indicated by **c** or **a**. For actions carried out on the spot a full stop (.) is used.

The orientation the dancer is **facing** is indicated by **a c i o**

The direction the dancer is **moving** is indicated by **subscripts a c i o**

Turns and pivots are described as being **clockwise**, (**T** and **p**) and **anticlockwise** (**T'** and **p'**). The letters **r** and **l** are reserved to indicate the **right** and **left** foot. Unless stated otherwise the circle and partner dances are started facing **anti-clockwise** along the circle line. A starting orientation other than anti-clockwise **a** at the commencement of a dance is indicated by one of the letters **i**, **o**, or **c** at the beginning of the dance notation. Although the orientation at any point of a dance can be worked out by following the steps from the beginning of a dance, it is sometimes helpful to include the actual orientation at a beginning of a section particularly in the more complex dances.

1.2 Timing and Counting

Counting of beats or steps is restricted to a maximum of eight. When counting steps, it is important to include pauses (sometimes referred to as a halt), that is beats during which no steps are taken. Table 1 below shows the letters, which are used to represent different counts of steps, allowing for pauses that are indicated by **P**.

Table 1. Timing and Counting Code

Code	Description of Beat and Step Count	Count
I	a single step. (1)	1
B	two steps on two beats. (1,2)	2
Y	three steps. (1,2,3)	3
W	four steps. (1,2,3,4)	4
S	six steps. (1,...,6)	6
E	eight steps. (1,...,8)	8
G	Seven steps with a pause on the second (1,P,3,...,8)	8
J	one step with a pause on the second beat. (1,P)	2
F	two steps with a pause on the third beat. (1,2,P)	3
Z	three steps with a pause on the fourth beat. (1,2,3,P)	4
H	five steps with a pause on the sixth beat (1, ,P)	6
A	(1,P,3,4,5,P)	6
V	seven steps with a pause on the eighth beat. (1,...,7,P)	8
X	three steps with a pause on the second beat. (1,P,3,4)	4
N	three steps with a pause on the third beat. (1,2,P,4)	4

To indicate fast (double rate) counting the code letter is underlined, and to indicate slow (half rate) counting the code letter is italicized and unbolded. The number of beats is correspondingly halved or doubled. Thus a **BZ** indicates a normal count of **1,2** followed by fast **1,2,3,P** each occupying a total of two normal beats. A group of eight normal beats is indicated by a full stop (.), a colon (:), a semi-colon(;) indicates three groups of eight. A comma (,) is used to indicate a count of four. The counting and timing information is directly below the code for the steps and is aligned with the steps.

The start of a dance on the correct beat is most important and sometimes difficult to identify. To assist with this, the first entry in the timing line of most dances is used. The use of comma,

(,) full stop, (.) semicolon (:) etc. indicates 4, 8, 16 etc. beats before the dance begins. Sometimes the first step is synchronized with the commencement of the singing. This is indicated by (L.) as the first entry in the timing line. A (L') indicates a subsequent start of the lyrics, (L+1). indicates a start one beat after the start of singing

The actual code for each dance includes two lines as shown below;

El Hachofesh {C} Avi Perez 93

{WT'_{5a}G_bX_iR_b(S_bS_p)BW_fT_aS_X}{W_{iT2Rb}}_oX_cTS_{XT'1}{[W_{cp}]W_{ixt}W_{iT2Rb}}_o
L.B B W.S B. B B B.2B B B. W . B B W. W 2B . W,

the second line is the timing and counting line, which has already been described in this section and defined in Table 1. It is important to realise that the same characters are used in the Main Code Line to represent actual steps. For example W and B represent a count of four steps and two steps in the timing line and walking and a balance in the code line as defined in Table 3.

FOR PARTNER DANCES NOTATION IS IN FOUR LINES :

LINE 1 FEMALE STEPS

LINE 2: **Hands and Stance**

LINE 3: MALE STEPS

LINE 4: **COUNTING LINE**

1.3 Non Weight Transfer Actions

The dance actions can be basically divided into two types. The first type result in the transfer of weight from one foot to the other like walking (described by upper case letters, symbols and numbers) in the code. The second type does not result in the transfer of weight from one foot to the other like touching (described by lower case letters). The full range of non-weight transfer actions is given in Table 2 below with the default values (those that are assumed for direction and starting foot) shown in bold. The non weight transfer action is often described in a subscript and performed as an adjunct to a weight transfer step, e.g. walking three steps and

a touch. If the walking begins with the right foot the touching action can only be performed by the non-weight bearing left foot. In such cases the foot is not normally identified.

Table 2. Non Weight Transfer Actions

d	knee down and up on both feet.
h	hop up and down on the right leg.
<u>h</u>	touch with the heel of the right foot.
k	kick with the right foot.
n	no action at all.
p/p'	pivot half a turn clockwise / anti-clockwise.
s	stomp with the right foot with no transfer of weight.
<u>t</u>	touch with the right foot.
t	bring foot together without transferring weight.
u	lift the right leg up by bending of the knee.
v	sweep or brush the ground with the right foot.
<u>z/z</u>	short hop on both feet with the feet together/apart to bend knees.

1.4 Weight Transfer Steps

Table 3 below lists the full range of weight transfer steps together with their defaults highlighted. Unless stated otherwise the starting leg and direction of steps is assumed to be that of the defaults. Certain combinations of steps occur often in dances have been assigned a single code letter. In some cases described in Table 3 below, the weight transfer sequence is shown for the default values in square brackets.

Table 3. Weight Transfer Steps

A	_ step on the right leg in the anti-clockwise direction, while dragging the left.
B	Balancing from side to side beginning onto the right leg in the anti-clockwise direction
<u>B</u>	same as B but with a swaying action
C	Closing steps with a transfer of weight.
D	Debka steps consisting of the lifting and straightening of the right knee

	(kicking action) while bouncing on the left leg (on the count of one) followed by a step onto the right leg (on a count of two). The default direction is into the center. Debka steps are repeated with alternative feet.
E	Eshebo step consisting of a kick of the right foot across the body followed by a step onto the right leg and then onto the left leg, on a quick count of Z
F	Emphatic stomp with weight transfer onto the right leg
G	Grapevine step beginning with a step onto the right leg in an anti-clockwise direction, followed with the left crossing in front, onto the right leg and left crossing behind, etc.
H	A hop on the left leg with the right leg moving anti-clockwise with a transfer of weight to the right leg.
J	A jump from the left leg onto the right leg. Successive jumps onto alternative legs.[rlrl]
J	Facing in, Jump onto both feet sideways apart on one, and together on two.
J'	Same as J , but with right leg in front and left behind on one, swapping positions on two.
N	Three steps walking forward. Step – together – step . Represented by WCW
N	Three side-ways steps. Step – together – step . Represented by SCS
O	Oriental half turn anti-clockwise beginning with the right leg pushing into the center rocking back onto the left on a count of two.
P	Polka three step with an emphasis on the first step beginning with a small jump onto the right leg followed by a quick left, right on the spot.
Q	A "camel" hop. While facing in, on the count of one, hopping back onto the right leg while lifting the left leg, followed by straightening out and jumping back onto the left on two.
R	Rocking forward and backward alternatively beginning with the right leg into the center
S	Sideways step onto the right leg anti-clockwise while facing in, followed by actions as indicated by subscripts as described in later sections.
S	Sideways sliding step of the right leg anti-clockwise with the left sliding together and weight being transferred to the left leg.
T	A full clockwise turn beginning with the right leg
T'	A full anti-clockwise turn beginning with the left leg

T_b	Steps of turn are backwards (T_{fb} in partner turns, male steps forward and female steps backwards)
<u>T</u>	Same as T but used in partner dances to describe turns of the partners together.
U	Twisting action starting clockwise twist with most weight on the right leg.
U'	Twisting action starting anti-clockwise with most weight on the right leg.
W	Walking beginning with the right leg, in the anti-clockwise direction
<u>W</u>	Running walk beginning with the right leg in the anti-clockwise direction
X	While facing in crossing with the left leg across the right and stepping onto it on one, rocking back onto the right leg on two and stepping on the left foot to the side of the right on three. Repeating in a mirror image .
X_b	While facing in crossing with the left leg behind the right and stepping onto it on one, rocking forward onto the right leg on two
Y	Yemenite step consisting of a balance B on a count of two followed by cross with and step onto the right leg in front of the left on the count of three usually followed by a pause. Repeats in a mirror image.[rlrPlrIP]
<u>Y</u>	Same as Y but with a substantial sideways travel in the subscript indicated direction
2	two steps forward beginning with the right foot in the anti-clockwise direction, with an anti-clockwise halt turn on the second step followed by two steps backwards. [rlrl]
3	three quick steps beginning with the right leg as executed for a Samba or Cha-Cha, in the anti-clockwise direction usually followed by a pause. The steps repeat with the other foot [rlrP], [lrIP].
<u>3</u>	Open and close three steps in partner dances with quarter turns anti-clockwise for the open and clockwise for the. The default starting foot being left .
&	Behind and in front while facing in beginning with a rocking action backwards onto the left leg, forward onto the right and the stepping onto the left leg inwards, all on a count of three, usually with a pause following i.e. [lrIP].
<u>&</u>	Same as & but travelling sideways in the anti-clockwise direction.
<u>&'</u>	Same as & but in front and behind beginning with the right leg.
[]	A square four step while facing in , beginning with a jump onto the right leg, crossing with the left and stepping onto it on the count of two , stepping back onto the right backwards on three, and onto the left leg to the side on four. [rlrl]

--	--

1.5 Default Values for Partner Dances

Tables 2 and 3 show that the default starting foot is the **right** leg for all the steps with the exception of & and anti-clockwise turns. In partner dances, the male starts with the left foot. As a consequence, the default starting leg for the male part for all the steps except for & and turns is changed to be the **left** leg. The defaults for &, turns, twists and pivots remain unchanged with ' indicating anticlockwise e.g. **T'**, **p' U'** and **&'**. In a smaller percentage of partner dances most actions for the male begin with the right foot. In such a case a change in this default setting for a specific partner dance to be the same as for a circle dance is indicated by the insertion of the letter **r** before the start of the coding of the steps.

FOR PARTNER DANCES NOTATION IS IN FOUR LINES :

LINE 1 FEMALE STEPS

LINE 2: **Hands and Stance**

LINE 3: MALE STEPS

LINE 4: **COUNTING LINE**

Table 4 Shows when the females steps are a simple variant of the male steps

{ }	to indicate no change whatsoever except in orientation as given by a subscript.
()	to indicate interchange between the left and right leg, but in moving in same direction. .
[]	to indicate a mirror image changing both direction and opposite footwork.
< >	to indicate a change in direction only. E.g.. out of the center instead of in.
« »	to indicate male and female are locked together , with linked footwork, and that they move as one unit in any direction or turn.

Table 5 Shows when one partner turns the other as indicated by ↻ ↺ ↻ ↺

↻	Female being turned clockwise by male
↺	Female being turned anti-clockwise by male
↻	Male being turned clockwise by female
↺	Male being turned anti-clockwise by female

Table 6 shows the hand-holds are indicated by

l l' r r' + +

l	The left hand of the male holds the left hand of the female.
l'	The left hand of the male holds the right hand of the female.
r	The right hand of the male holds the right hand of the female.
r'	The right hand of the male the holds left hand of the female.
+	The left hand of the male holds the left hand of the female and the right hand of the male holds the right hand of the female.
+'	The left hand of the male holds the right hand of the female and the right hand of the male the holds left hand of the female.

Table 7 shows the **STANCES** that the partners can take are represented by

F B E and E'

F	male and female partners FACE each other, and stand directly facing each other
B	male and female partners are BACK to BACK , directly opposite each other
E	male and female partners face the same (EQUAL) direction, with the male positioned directly behind the female
E'	male and female partners face the same (EQUAL) direction, with the female positioned directly behind of the male
s_r	female partner is to the right side of the male (default)
s_l	female partner is to the left side of the male
p_r	female partner is partly to the right of the male (default)
p_l	female partner is partly to the left of the male

Table 8 shows the modifications of the **STANCES** that the female partner can take

and are represented by **s_r s_l p_r p_l**

1.5.1 **D**
i
r
e
c
t
i
o
n
s
t

he dancers are **facing for Partner Dances**
Table 9 shows that the direction the dancers **face** is indicated by **a c i o** and **a' c' i' o'**

a	Both male and female partners face anticlockwise .
a'	The male faces anticlockwise , and the female faces clockwise .
c	Both male and female partners face clockwise .
c'	The male faces clockwise , and the female faces anticlockwise
i	Both male and female partners face in .
i'	The male faces in , and the female faces out .
o	Both male and female partners face out .
o'	The male faces out , and the female faces in

Table 10 shows the relative position of the male dancer in comparison to the female dancer is by the **a c i o**

<u>a</u>	The male is positioned on the anticlockwise side of the female.
<u>c</u>	The male is positioned on the clockwise side of the female.
<u>i</u>	The male is positioned on the inner side of the female.
<u>o</u>	The male is positioned on the outer side of the female.

When the partners move and swap (cross) places, **Table 11** shows the where the crossing movement of the male dancer occurs in comparison to the female dancer and this is indicated by the *undersigned unbolded italic superscripts* *a c i o*

<i><u>a</u></i>	The male <u>crosses</u> on the anticlockwise side of the female
<i><u>c</u></i>	The male <u>crosses</u> on the clockwise side of the female
<i><u>i</u></i>	The male <u>crosses</u> on the inner side of the female
<i><u>o</u></i>	The male <u>crosses</u> on the inner side of the female

1.6 Step Modification

Subscripts are used to specify the selection of the foot and direction of movement. In additions they can be used to modify or combine steps. Table 13 shows the meaning of the subscripts used that are additional to those whose meaning has already been described.

Table 13. Action modifying subscripts

b	Backwards or behind: E.g.. W_b = Walking backwards, R_b = rocking beginning with the first step being backwards, G_b = the first crossing step
----------	---

	in the grapevine is behind.
f	in front: E.g.. S_{bfb} = Step, cross behind, step, cross in front, step, cross behind.
1,2etc	indicate the amount of turn or pivot. 1 = quarter, 2 = half, 3 = three quarter, 4 = full, 5= one and a quarter 6 = one and a half.
x/x	with crossing action: E.g. W_x = Walking with a crossing action of the right leg across the left and left across the right, W_x = Walking with a skating action, ie. side to side.
+	on both feet.
'	As a superscript e.g. W' , Y' , X' indicates a lifting action during a pause.

The non-weight transfer actions listed in Table 2, (lower case letters), when used as subscript, each assume a single count, leaving the balance of the count to the balance of the step. E.g. **W_h** shows a total count of four with three steps and a hop.

The weight transfer steps listed in Table 3, (upper case letters), when used as subscript to combine steps, e.g.. **W_{ij}**, **S_x** , **B_T** assume a count of two except:

- **C**, **J** and **S** have a count of one.
- **X** has a variable number of steps as described in Section 1.6.2 below.
- **T** and **T'** have a count of two when used as subscripts to **B** and **R**. When used as subscripts to **S** they are described in 1.6.1 below . When used as subscripts in all other cases they serve to introduce rotation to those steps and do not have counts themselves.

In the instance that the step S is used as a subscript, the step is not sideways but is on the spot to maintain balance.

After allowing for the counts of all the subscripts the balance of the count is assumed for the step. The examples below illustrate the use of subscripts.

Eg.1 **W_{ik}** Eg.2 **Y_h** Eg.3 **T_{2X}** Eg.4 **T'_{i2Rb}** Eg5. **S_{bfb}** Eg6. **S_CX**
 W **W** **Y-E** **W** **A** **Z B**

Example 1: Walk beginning with the right leg into the center three, kick with the left on four.

Example 2: Yemenite right step (1,2,3) followed by a hop on the right leg (4).

Example 3: Clockwise half turn on three, continuing with a crossing and straightening action (4,5,6,7,8)

Example 4: Anti-clockwise turn into the center (1,2), rock backwards onto the left and back onto the right (3,4)

Example 5: Facing in, single step with the right anti-clockwise (1,P), step with the left behind the right (3), onto the right (4), cross with the left in front and step on it and pause (5,P), touch with the right and pause (7,P).

Example 6: A fast step together step pause in the anti-clockwise direction, with weight transfer [rlrP], on two beats, followed by a cross with the left and back on the right, on two beats.

1.6.1 The use of T and T' as subscripts

When **T** is used as a subscript to **S**, the step assumes a count of one and serves as a spring for the turn, thus a step on to the right leg [**r**] is followed by an anti-clockwise turn [**lr**.], and a step onto the left leg [**l**] is followed by a clockwise turn [**rl**.].

When **T** is used as a subscript to **B**, the balance assumes a count of two with the second step serving as a spring for the turn. Thus a balance onto the right leg [**rl**] is followed by a clockwise turn [**rl**.], and a balance onto the left leg [**lr**] is followed by an anti-clockwise turn [**lr**.].

different substitutions, multiple forward slashes are used to separate the substitution on successive repeats.

Greek letters α , β , δ , γ etc. are used as superscript on brackets to define the steps contained within those brackets. When the steps defined by the Greek letters are required in another part of a dance, the Greek letters are used in a normal format (not superscript) to represent those steps. Greek letter superscripts on a bracket that itself is in a superscript format indicates that there is no repetition indicated by that bracket and that the bracket serves merely to identify the steps being defined. Greek letter superscripts on brackets that are themselves not superscripts, include the repetition indicated by these brackets in the definition.

The following example demonstrates the use of repetitions.

$$[\mathbf{W}_{ih}]^{\alpha} \{ \mathbf{PSC} \}^4 \alpha^2 \langle (\mathbf{J}_i \mathbf{3}_i) \rangle \mathbf{Y}_{/h}$$

$\mathbf{W} \cdot \quad \underline{\mathbf{2Z}} \quad \mathbf{2B}$
 $\mathbf{B} \quad \underline{\mathbf{Z}} \cdot \quad \mathbf{Z/W} \cdot$

The above example consists of a number of parts as follows:

- Section one consist of a walk of three steps into the center [**rlr**] and hop on right, repeat in mirror image, walk out [**lrl**] and hop on the left. Total count of eight beats. This section is defined by α .
- Section two consists of two quick polka steps [**rlrP**] and [**lrlP**] indicated by **2Z**. As the counts are double normal speed they occupy four normal counts. To the two polka steps are added two sideways steps beginning with the right leg and closing with weight transfer to the left [**rlrl**]. Total count of the two polka steps and two sidesteps is eight. This second section is repeated four times as indicated by the superscript of 4.
- Section three consists of a double repeat of section one as indicated by α^2 .
- The fourth section uses two sets of brackets to indicate firstly a repeat with just a change of the starting leg and then a repeat of the first two repeats but in the opposite direction. The steps described are a jump in onto the right, a jump onto the left, quick three step in [**rlr**], a repeat with a jump in onto the left, a jump in onto the right, a quick three step in [**lrl**]. The whole section is repeated in the opposite direction, outwards.
- The last section shows the use of a / to show a right Yemenite [**rlrP**], followed by a left Yemenite [**lrl**] with a hop on the fourth count on the left foot.