

The Texas Tommy

(United States)

Also known as the Texas Tommy Swing, this historic American folk dance is widely recognized as the earliest form of swing dancing, created by African Americans in San Francisco's Barbary Coast around 1910. We had only vague descriptions of the Texas Tommy until a silent film recently surfaced with scenes of San Francisco, circa 1910, featuring clips of two couples doing the Texas Tommy. We clearly see that it was an evolution of the two-step, which was in turn a modification of the polka. Johnny Peters took the Texas Tommy to New York in 1911 where it achieved brief fame in vaudeville before evolving into the Lindy Hop over the next fifteen years.

Music: 1910 Ragtime

Rhythm: 4/4 meter, approximately 100 beats/min

Formations: Cpls in variations of Ballroom pos. One was a shldr hold. Another was M's R arm around W's waist with her L hand holding his R bicep; M's L hand holding W's R bicep or elbow with her R hand floating free.

Open 2-hand hold, facing ptr.

Back-to-back open 2-hand hold.

Single R-to-R hand hold.

Tandem Pos (W's back to M's front in an open 2-hand hold, hands held at W's shldr level.

Steps: Texas Tommy Basic Step: M step on L to side (ct 1); hop on L bringing R in the air behind his L (ct 2); scuff R ft downward to the ground and away to his R (ct 3); hop on L (ct 4). Repeat with opp ftwk and direction. W dances opp steps, mirror image.

Style: Vertical posture, very loose and easygoing, with free hands floating easily, with a downward bouncing throughout like a jackhammer.

Texas Tommy Polka: M step on L to L side, at the same time flicking the R ft out to the R side (ct 1); step on R approaching L (ct 2); step on L to L side as above (ct 3); hold (ct 4). Repeat with opp ftwk and direction. W dances opp steps, mirror image.

Shoulder-Hold Pos: Posture is lower to the ground than the Texas Tommy Basic Step.

Texas Tommy Galop: Version A: Cts 1 and 2 of the Texas Tommy Polka repeated, traveling toward the M's L side.

Version B (not done in class): M drops L in place while at the same time flicking the R ft out to the R side (ct 1); take wt with the extended R toe and L approaches R. Repeat traveling to the M's R side.

Texas Tommy Pivots (Dynamic Pivots). W steps R in place, R ft pointed to R, as M steps L around W's R ft, rotating halfway CW (ct 1); repeat with opp roles (ct 2). Repeat, traveling in LOD.

Figures: Texas Tommy Basic: Texas Tommy Basic Step done in an open 2-hand hold facing ptr, neither rotating nor traveling.

The Texas Tommy—continued

Back-to-Back: Same step, letting go of one hand to roll away to back-to-back pos and re-take free hand. Return to facing ptr. Take either hand and turn in either direction.

Right-to-Right Hands: Same step, M gives his R hand over to W's R hand, facing ptr with Basic Step holding R hand in R hand.

W's Underarm Turn: Same step, M encircles W's head to lead her to turn CW or CCW, with either his R or L hand.

Free Spin: When doing Pivots, M lets W go, she does one full pivot turn solo. M catches W's R hand with his L and immediately brings her back into more pivots. Or he catches her R hand with his R hand to bring her into Tandem Pos.

Hand Behind Her Back Swing-out: M places W's R hand comfortably behind her back during the pivots, takes it with his R hand, then lets her unwind to swing-out pos and rewind back in again, placing his free L hand on her R shldr. Or from this R-to-R hands, he may bring her into Tandem pos.

The two couples in the film clips did many more figures but these are some of the essential ones.

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