



What Is Natural About A Natural Turn?

by Harold & Meredith Sears

In Foxtrot, we have a variety of natural turns that turn right, and unnatural turns (that is, reverse turns :-) that turn left. Do we call right turns “natural” because a majority of us are right-handed? Is this some subtle disrespect for lefties? No, we think right turns might really be easier and in that sense more natural, and this ease has little to do with right- or left-handedness.

If right turning figures are easier, then it is odd that we seem to dance left-turning figures more often. We have left turns, reverse turns, open and closed telemarks, all manner of telespins, the promenade weave, and more. We recently looked at the Hall Of Fame/Golden Classic *Kiss Me Goodbye*, by Koit & Hellen Tullus. We counted ten left-turning figures in the cue sheet and only three right-turning figures. So we do feel comfortable with most of our reverse figures. Certainly, Meredith and I do a much smoother Double Reverse Spin than a Double Natural Spin. But we still think that a Natural Turn might be technically easier than a Reverse Turn.

Natural Turn —

The Natural Turn begins in closed position facing diagonal line and wall with trail feet free. The man lowers, begins to turn right, and steps forward right, rising. The woman steps back left. He steps forward and side left through the woman and across the line of dance, leading her to do a heel turn, and then steps back right to closed position facing reverse line of dance. We’ve really done just half of the figure, a Half Natural, but this is enough.

One of our teachers recently emphasized that left-turning figures turn late, and right-turning figures turn early. He was specifically talking about foot turn, a change in the direction in which the toes point. He was not talking about body rotation or side lead or slice. You can dance a Feather and in the process turn your torso fully 1/8 to the right, but if the man’s toes are still pointing down line of dance and you’re still dancing down line (in this nice contra position), you haven’t “turned” at all. Upper body rotation can signal that we are going to turn, but we haven’t actually turned until the toes are pointing in a new direction.

Again, in right-turning figures, the actual foot turn tends to be early, *accompanied* by upper-body rotation. In left-turning figures, upper-body rotation *precedes* foot turn, and the foot turn is late. So in our Half Natural, the man begins with his toes

pointing toward diagonal line and wall. He signals a right turn with upper body rotation, but at the same time he allows his foot to turn as he steps forward right. As he takes weight, his toes are pointing toward the wall. Foot turn has occurred early, as the step is taken.

Are we able to dance this early turn because the right turns are easier? In good closed position, the woman is on the man's right side, on the inside of the circle. She is naturally on the pivot point for the couple. So we easily dance around her heel turn — naturally.

Reverse Turn —

But what is the situation in a Reverse Turn? We're still in closed position, facing line and center now. The man lowers a bit into his right knee, initiates upper-body turn with right-side lead, and steps forward left rising. Left turns are late, so he begins with his toes pointing line and center, and he takes his first step with his toes still pointing straight down that diagonal line. He has begun to initiate the left-face turn, but at the point of the first step, that turn has not yet begun. He takes weight on his left, and only now turns about 1/8 to the left. Now his toes are pointing toward the center of hall. The woman has stepped straight back, brought her left foot to her right, and with the delayed turn on the part of the man, has begun her heel turn. He steps forward and side on his right foot, through the woman, continuing the turn, she completes her heel turn and changes weight to her left foot. To end the measure, he steps back left and she steps forward right to closed position facing reverse line of dance.

Was that harder than the Natural Turn? In closed position, the woman is on the man's right side — into his right arm. That's a good place for her to be if the man is to curve around her to the right, but now we want to turn left. If the man were to use early turn here, he would turn away from her and get into some right-hip-to-right-hip banjo position, or he would have to rudely jerk her to his left. Turns to the left are delayed so that we can place the woman gently onto the pivot point for the couple. There, she can bring her heels together for the heel turn, and only then can the man step with his *right* foot through the woman's unweighted left side and gracefully make the turn.

In the Natural Turn, the man can immediately begin the turn because she is already on the inside of the curve, and he is in good position to go around her. In the Reverse Turn, we can't jump right in. We have to anticipate or set up the turn first. We use the first step to place her on the "turning spot," and only then is the man on the outside of the curve and ready to make the turn. In this respect, left-turning figures would seem to be more difficult.

We dance Reverse Turns, Open Telemarks, and Reverse Waves all the time, and we just dance them. But pay attention next time, and see if you aren't doing something a little more sophisticated than when you dance a Natural Turn. Natural Turns are just easier.